



VARIANT

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interviews
John La Rose
Diamanda Galás

polemic
Avant-Gardism
The New Primitives
Gender & Technology

**Visual,
Aural &
Live Arts
Reviews**

Jess waited on
the water I got new shoes



arts media ideas cultures



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Variant is a magazine of cross-currents in culture:
 ...initiatives in the visual
 & performing arts,
 moving image, new media practices, experimental musics,
 cultural & media criticism,
 philosophy & politics...

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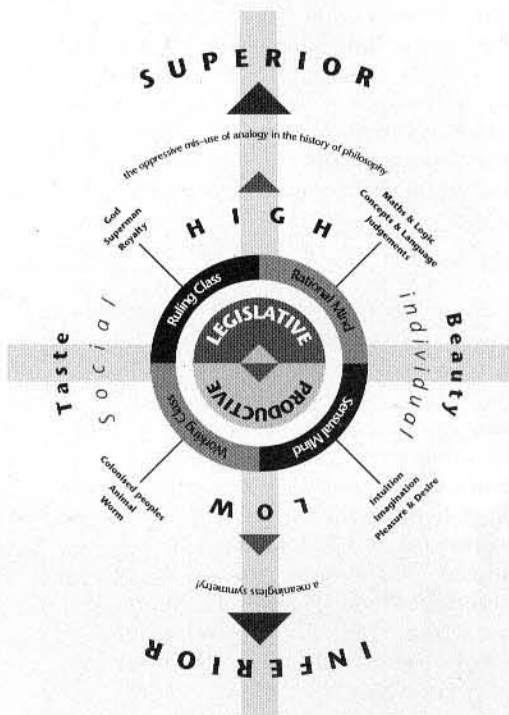
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graphic from review on p50. Avant-garde pic: Basil, Roy, Steve & Lord Leighton, by Sam Taylor-Wood. Gender & Tech pic: Placeholder, by Brenda Laurel & Rachel Strickland

... At the risk of proselytizing, it is occasionally necessary to express the conscious editorial stance of a magazine—not only to benefit the new readers we aim to reach with each issue, but to resist the active misreading that occurs in the ongoing struggle over meaning (regulars will not have any desire to be brow-beaten). The areas that are covered in Variant are driven by creative expression: the contributions are what gives the magazine its tone and identity—it is a forum for conflicting opinions and tendencies (*cross-currents*). Having an 'accent' on contemporary Scottish culture and by looking outwards, the magazine attempts to contribute to a healthy, confident, constructive and contentious debate which can only sharpen the criteria for 'artmaking,' of whatever complexion.

One of the critical functions (read *diagnostic* and *urgent*, not *captious* or *disapproving*) of this—and which we would hope is applied by other magazines—is that it retains an autonomy from vested interests: artistic or political, private or public. Variant is not concerned with providing the 'institutional' art machine with an approving image of itself or with the vapid arguments over dominant styles or media, which is not to say that this may not occur, now and again, when circumstances permit.

This is not a counter-cultural exercise in style or the creation of an imaginary community of resistance: the centre *vs* periphery analogy is perhaps an argument which tends to bolster the centre whilst weakening the 'fringes' in the very construct of that thinking, since it suggests that the edges are shaped by that which they are excluded from. That a centre of power exists is not in doubt: who writes official history, or the software for the electronic media; who decides what you can and cannot see, hear or read. Where feasibility studies reinforce tried and tested methods and the rhetoric of business management squeezes out any element of unpredictability, certain ideas cannot get shelf space and certain practices cannot find outlets. That is why some things tend to be 'underground' or 'marginal,' but it doesn't mean that they are on a smaller scale, of less wide appeal, or of 'inferior quality' (according to taste) to that which is considered to be mainstream and therefore unquestionably accepted. This assumes a regulated system around the circulation and interpretation of artworks *and* ideas, which is institutionally constructed. It is our understanding that you cannot be determined in opposition, and that particular practices and social formations are *a culture of their own*: you cannot compartmentalise art and ideas or the way they transform themselves by cross-fertilization. Culture is not static and it is that which poses a threat to conservative establishments.

It is not a coincidence, therefore, that the title of this magazine takes its meaning from that of a *different version* or *another reading*. Not a subordinate one, but one that attempts to proclaim: the centre is here and is wherever identity is asserted in its own terms.

This is not to impose a didactic role on reluctant artforms at the expense of the buzz, contemplation, or intellectual and emotional demand that an individual may obtain from art; nor to destroy the aesthetic parameters specific to any one medium. The preservation of the hermetic qualities of certain practices, for example, is not inconsistent with an argument for their integration within a context of wider sympathies. Art does not exist in a vacuum: intellectual self-preservation maintains a sense of purpose not in itself but through the actions of social groupings. In the artistic domain this requires the creation of new coalitions and networks to resist the narrowing of the imaginative horizon: new ways of sharing ideas, however awkward that may be and with whatever resources are at hand. Whilst the question of technologies is hinged to that of access and therefore an important issue for this magazine, the more important issue is of methodologies: how do we move forward when the most basic requirements for democracy are disappearing?

For the establishment of a critical, engaging and diverse culture, lateral links need to be made across media, and opinions need to be expressed *and* exposed: that is central to how a nation (or a nation within a nation) thinks about itself and is the grounds by which it can speak to others. Variant, we hope, contributes something to the terms under which that is possible. In a country where the aspirations of political timeservers never supersede the coffee-table, and where cultural winetasters window shop for novelty, the adoption of such a position may seem maverick: but why coax the consensus when you can demand a little bit of fresh air, and something much more?

Contributors to issue 16

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Moscow photographs on pp3 & 48-49 by **Martin Hunter**, a freelance photographer based in Glasgow—mobile 0860 202 804

Agitprop on pp19 & 67 by **Citizen Sem**: Antics, Edinburgh

Artists pages by **Ashley Cook**. Ashley Cook graduated from Glasgow School of Art in 1986, where she is now Head of Silkscreen in the Printmaking Department. Her one-person show *Due To Human Error* was at Glasgow Print Studio in Nov 1991 (see review in *alba*, vol 1, no 6). In 1993 she was visiting artist at the University of Washington in Seattle, USA and to Reyjavik, Iceland.

Her early work dealt with gender and sexuality but has now moved towards dealing with emotional conflict and a search for identity. The works are autobiographical and deal with fallen personal utopias: "I am trying to find out what is reasonable to expect in terms of happiness and justice and in thinking about the lack of simplicity in determining what is right and wrong in a climate of moral relativism. Acknowledging the value of imagination and dreams (aspirations) can lead to massive disappointments, but it seems bleaker to live with no expectations... I am trying to find the line between idealism and delusion." Ashley is currently seeking out new forms of distribution for her work. The works reproduced here all date from 1991:

Front Cover: *Jesus Walked On The Water/I Got No Shoes*. Screenprint 31"x43" Inside Front Cover: *Kiss, Cuddle or Torture*. Screenprint 31"x43" Outside Back: *No Dreams*. Screenprint 31"x43"
Ashley Cook's prints photographed by Simon Starting

Moscow barricade protest October 1993 photo Martin Hunter



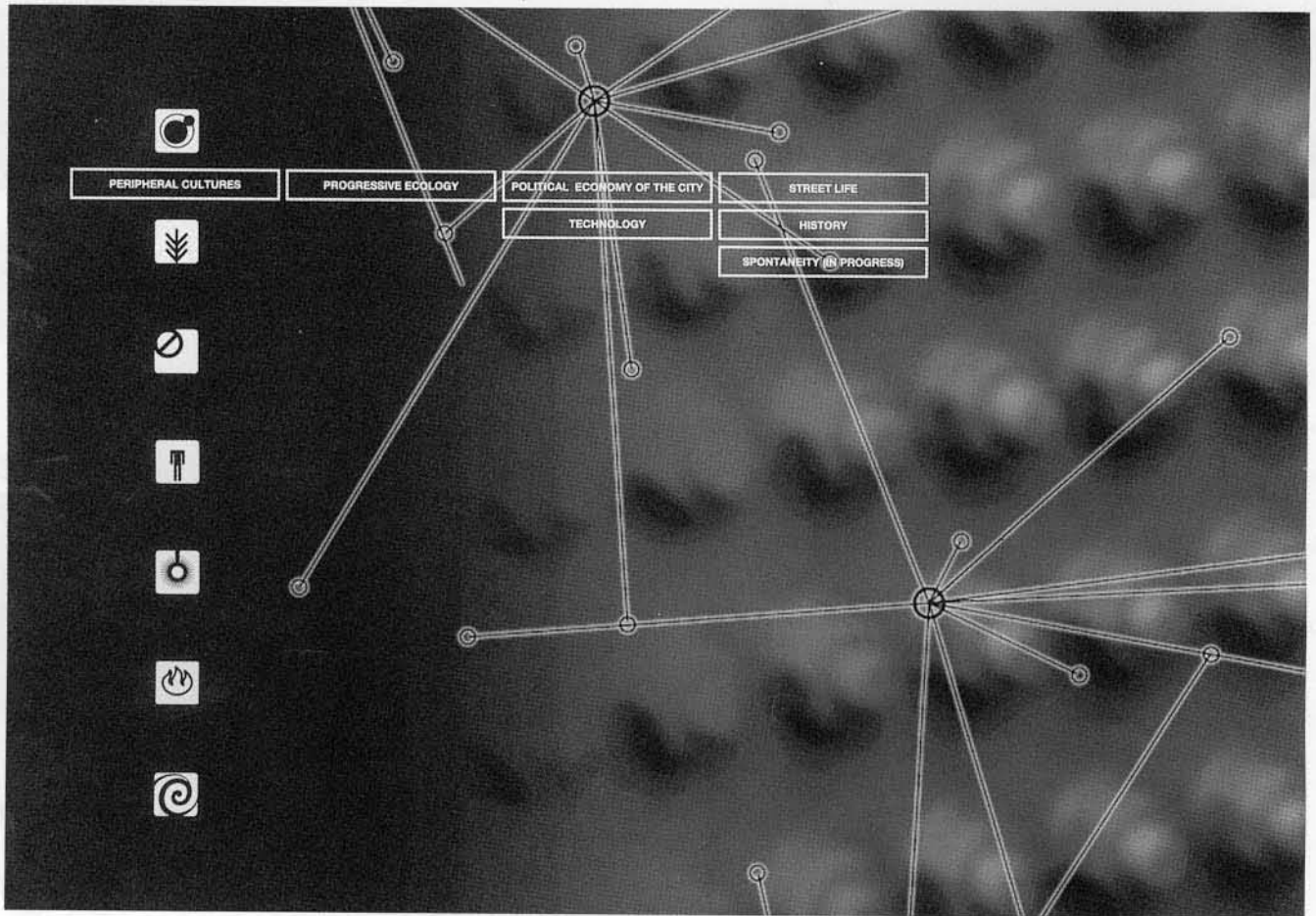


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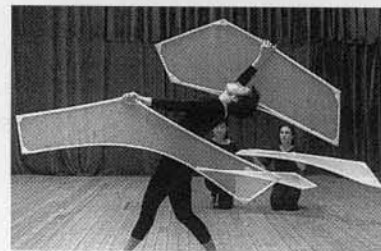


photo A. Chambaretaud

Manifesto of the social

**Winterschool—
2-8 January 1994**

The achievements of Winterschool
will be recorded, exhibited and published.
Contact: Winterschool Office,
Architecture Building
131 Rottenrow, Glasgow
G4 0NG
Tel 041-552 4400 ext 2146 | Fax 041-552 3997

imagin

Winterschool exists as an alternative forum for architecture, an experimental platform and multi-media event. It is initiated by architectural students at Strathclyde University and encompasses workshops, lectures, debates, performances, anarchic city activities and public involvement in architecture, with over 100 innovative, avant-garde architects, artists, performers and philosophers taking part.

The planned spontaneity of challenging, confrontational and multi-disciplinary events—on all scales—involving at least 1200 students from all over Europe and many people in Glasgow, will make *Winterschool* a unique and unmissable event.

The aim is to democratise architecture by encouraging more open debate and increased public and inter-professional participation. All avenues and aspects of architecture are open to be challenged. It will not restrict itself to architecture but embrace art, music, drama, dance, theatre, poetry, literature, politics, philosophy, film, psychology; architecture is simply a starting point, a foundation for ideas, an inspiration for action and a catalyst for chaos. Agitation, propaganda and performance are the key elements of *Winterschool '94*, which will be at the forefront of the contemporary architectural debate, with participants testing out radical ideas on a highly critical and informed audience.

The framework for *Winterschool '94* is constructed around seven themes; within each theme there will be ten workshops. Each of these workshops will explore the theme, using a different medium; from philosophy to live projects and propaganda to performance. Lectures are integral to this, stimulating ideas to be developed in the workshops. The thematic nature of *Winterschool '94* will demand a rigorous response from contributors. Anarchic energies will be harnessed to focus on contemporary issues of the built environment.

The structure has been drawn up as a flexible diagrammatic framework, designed to cater for many individual needs. It is meant to focus the energies of *Winterschool* and not constrain individual creativity. As always, *Winterschool* depends solely on the public/participant to make it a worthwhile event.

Events will take place on the streets of Glasgow and in the Arches, Tramway & Fruit Market—three of the most dynamic and publicly accessible spaces in the city, spaces that will contribute to the radical and innovative nature of *Winterschool*.

Speakers and participants include **Matthew Fuller** (Propaganda), **Stewart Home** (London's dynamic urban environment), **Stefan Szczelkun** (cultural reassessment of history), **Pascale Lecoq** (the play of portable structures), **Julian Maynard Smith** (performance systems), **Costas Evengelatos** (art on the cultural margin), **Mary J. Rooney** (cultural coalitions), **Mark Major** (light in architecture), **Archimedia** (living on the edge), **Solchiro Tsukamoto** (Hirameki and Majiwari), **Mark Hawker** (body enquiries), **Vanda Krajnovic** (is there a dominant visual narrative?), **Station House Opera** (challenging obedience), **Workshop for Non-Linear Architecture** (auto-dynamic navigation), **George Wyllie** (Wally Dugs), **Flipside & Eccentric Vaudeville** ("juggling won't get you to heaven"), **Nold Egenter** (street procession), **Russ Foreman** (alternative history of sound), **Georgina Bell** (perceptions of sound), **Cylinder** (Art is (I)T: a heart of wrenching desire).

PERIPHERAL CULTURES—This theme will examine the definitions and validity of the core/periphery, both in a geographic and a social sense...

- *the edge of the world *the edge of Europe *the edge of the city
- *the edge of social groups *the edge of experience
- *the edge of conflict *the edge of harmony.

PROGRESSIVE ECOLOGY—"Western man has developed a view of himself as separate from and in opposition to nature, an arrogant and selfish proposition that has brought the planet to the brink of ecological catastrophe" [James Wines]. The problem remains of the marginalisation of green consciousness. Progressive ecology must adopt a political agenda and must address the sacred idea of personal wealth before a lasting sustainable culture will be tolerated. The critical question, in relation to this crisis (of confidence) is: what will be the role of architecture?

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE CITY—One of the most profound problems that we face within our cities at the end of the Twentieth Century is the simultaneous destruction and privatisation of public urban space and the rapid development of zoning patterns that are fragmenting cities on strict class and race lines. An architect's view of the city must be prepared to interact with that of the politician, economist and developer.

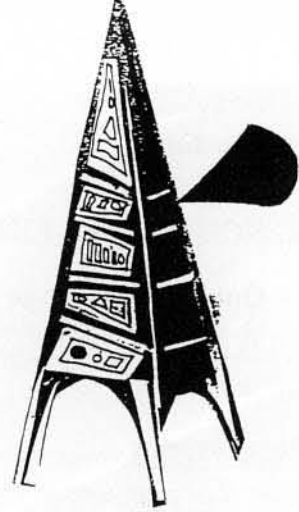
STREET LIFE—Architecture can be seen in relation to elements used in popular media and culture; image montages and MTV, erratic clothing combinations which reverse over-under garments, culinary tastes which mix and match distant traditions, game-boys and ram-raiders, vigilantes and super models, new dance steps and hallucinogenic states of mind. Fashion is generating new values in music, shop front design, literature (a book which erases each line seconds after you read it), dance, theatre and art (painting with semen and blood in the age of HIV). The problem is: can architecture address these new values?

TECHNOLOGY—"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" [Arthur C. Clarke]. For the first time, technology, or hi-tech, has helped develop a youth pop culture, a counter-culture which has expressed itself through pop videos, in the hacker underground, in the jarring street-tech of hip-hop, rap and techno and the 'cyberpunk' tradition in literature, graphics and film. Technology also has implications for the relationship between society, authoritarian control and architecture.

HISTORY—"Conventionally, architecture as a design discipline has not engaged in scientific research. Architectural theory was left to the art historian, who bases his science on aesthetic principles and thus distinguishes 'high architecture' from mere buildings" [Nold Egenter]. Younger generations are now confronted with profound challenges which call on us to make sense of dislocation, disorientation and lack of meaning. We are rehearsing for a genuine sense of solidarity and reciprocal fulfilment which we may never feel.

SPONTANEITY (In Progress)—It is basically impossible to determine beforehand what changes will take place in that revolutionary moment, called by actors the "point of divergence." It is impossible to predict whether the system will disintegrate into 'Chaos' or become a dissipated structure on a more differentiated and more advanced level of order.

ation



Allison McCloy

Who Calls the City as a work of art **The Tune?**

*Andrew Guest of the Scottish Sculpture Trust
proposes some new approaches to Public Art
in Glasgow & Scotland*

The City as a Work of Art has arisen both from my approach to sculpture, formed after making exhibitions in a gallery for 7 years, and from the Trust's re-assessment of its relationship to sculpture in Scotland. We define sculpture as work produced by any artist where the use of space plays a major part. This is not a brilliant or exact definition, but first, it is not my job to define sculpture, and secondly, as we will see, sculpture in particular has a need to define itself.

But—what space, whose space, and where is this space?

The Trust wants to help find space where sculpture can thrive, enlarge that space, and make it better. We're not looking at the periphery for this space—art is not peripheral, it's central. We've been led to believe it's peripheral by specialised education, specialised perception, by it becoming a commodity you take home or trade, and as something you only find in an art gallery.

This situation may be tolerable for that art of imagination called painting, which has risen to pre-eminence as part of this—it fits well into galleries, doesn't take up space, is easily moved around, into the stores, or into slides and books.

But the art of making or creation called sculpture, has been suffocated by the dominance of the gallery and its artificial space. How many exhibitions or books about Scottish Art completely ignore sculpture? The curators cannot cope because it doesn't fit, it needs different terms of reference. But it was never meant to fit into that particular world.

From my gallery perspective I used to think that sculpture was just 3D visual art—but I now see sculpture as defining itself not primarily by its 3-dimensionality, but by the fact that it can naturally concern itself, through its 3-dimensionality, with issues of form, materials, and space—not the use-less space of the gallery, where factors like fashion, the stock market, intellectual and economic aristocracy have more influence, but the richness of social space or, in other words, place.

The Trust has two main aims—to make more opportunities for sculpture, and to make it an integral part of the social and cultural life of Scotland—this could be roughly translated as seeing brilliant sculpture made in Scotland—'see' and 'made' being the important words. We are not going to achieve this without tackling these circumstances of which space and where. The Trust's goals are not a new exhibition, a new workshop, or a new gallery—they are not about making the cultural park bigger but about getting sculpture out of the cultural zoo and back into its native habitat: championing sculpture's natural right to public space.

In this particular story we cannot let the piper call the tune—we're talking about art—that task must be undertaken by the artist. But at the same time sculpture cannot work effectively in public space unless it is attuned to many voices, unless it works with that space and the making and using of that space. The very involvement of art in public space can in itself serve to bring about that many-sided dialogue, that sharing of concerns, a broadening of the vision of the function of place. Confronting the issues of materials, form, use, place, can generate powerful ideas more than restrict personal expression, if you take them on. In other ways artists have been sheltered by the art world. This shelter has protected some, but it's been awfully small, especially for sculpture.

The City As A Work of Art project starts from the simple perception that there are a group of people generally given the responsibility for creating the forms and designing the spaces that we inhabit—architects. If sculpture is to grow naturally as part of this same world, then sculptors and architects at the very least have to start getting their act together.

They are educated in the same place, but have little contact there, so it is not surprising that they have little contact thereafter. There are big differences in the practising world—

architects have strength in numbers, an apparent indispensability, and work under completely different professional conditions, fuelled and supported by a wave of building and development. Artists pick their way across a barer terrain with extraordinary commitment to ideals and considerable survival skills.

But beneath these differences there are enormous shared interests and skills, and the potential of a dynamic relationship, which we know has existed before. As the architectural profession suffers attack from deregulation, lowest-cost and design-build, is there, ironically, a new opportunity for architects to produce more architecture and less building? Artists have a natural role to play in the reaffirmation of art in architecture, but only through developing closer relationships, built on greater understanding of respective roles and common goals.

The project was designed to see what the current state of their relationship was, and how they could work together. The only brief is an individual commitment to the possibility of a dynamic relationship, a commitment to the City—this being Glasgow in particular. The project was designed deliberately to take artists and architects away from the pressure of client demands—to let their ideas flow, and let their relationship develop. It has also been kept deliberately on a small-scale pilot basis.

The project has happened in three stages:

- 1] Bringing small groups of artists and architects together to talk about the City, their relationship to the City, and the possible common ground for their individual approaches. Several bars and studios in Glasgow have hosted passionate discussions about art and the city.
- 2] Through individuals talking more specifically about their own work and ideas, several teams or partnerships have formed. Each of these groups has been working separately on their own ideas.
- 3] The directions that people have gone in show that this process offers scope to a wide variety of ideas and practices and can impinge on the city in different ways. Seven different projects are currently being explored. Peter McCaughey and Stephen Skrynka have both responded to the opportunity given by McGurn

Logan Duncan and Opfer (architects) to interact with an old Mill building in the Gorbals which MLDO are about to redevelop as their new office. The artists' work in the building—as it hangs between the past and the future—is intended both to draw attention to the building itself, and to sketch new approaches to its redevelopment. (Peter McCaughey's use of this building as a giant light-box is reported in this issue of *Variant*, pp10–11). Paul Clarke and Alison McCloy are producing proposals for a use of the river Clyde's edge in Glasgow, to knit the river—metaphorically—back into the life of its people. Further along the river Sandy Stoddart and John Macfarlane have found the perfect site from which a statue of Equality can look across to New York's Liberty. Stephen Beddoe and Chris Stewart are proposing the transformation of the water-tower in Drumchapel into a science and weather station for the community. Two water-towers in Garthamlock and Cranhill have also become the focus for a group involving architects Gary Johnson and Ian Robertson. The artist Jim Hamlyn is negotiating a contract with MLDO whereby an object made by him, within agreed parameters, will be included in every project completed by them over a certain number of years.

The final part of the project will be the publication of these proposals, along with pieces written around the same theme, and the distribution and presentation of these ideas and this process to a wider public. *The City As A Work of Art* is not a one-off project, but the beginning of a long dialogue which must expand and extend, and gradually feed into 'mainstream' practice. It is about finding a common creative commitment to the city, about bringing poetry to planning for the city, and about a gentle shift of relationships towards some new priorities.

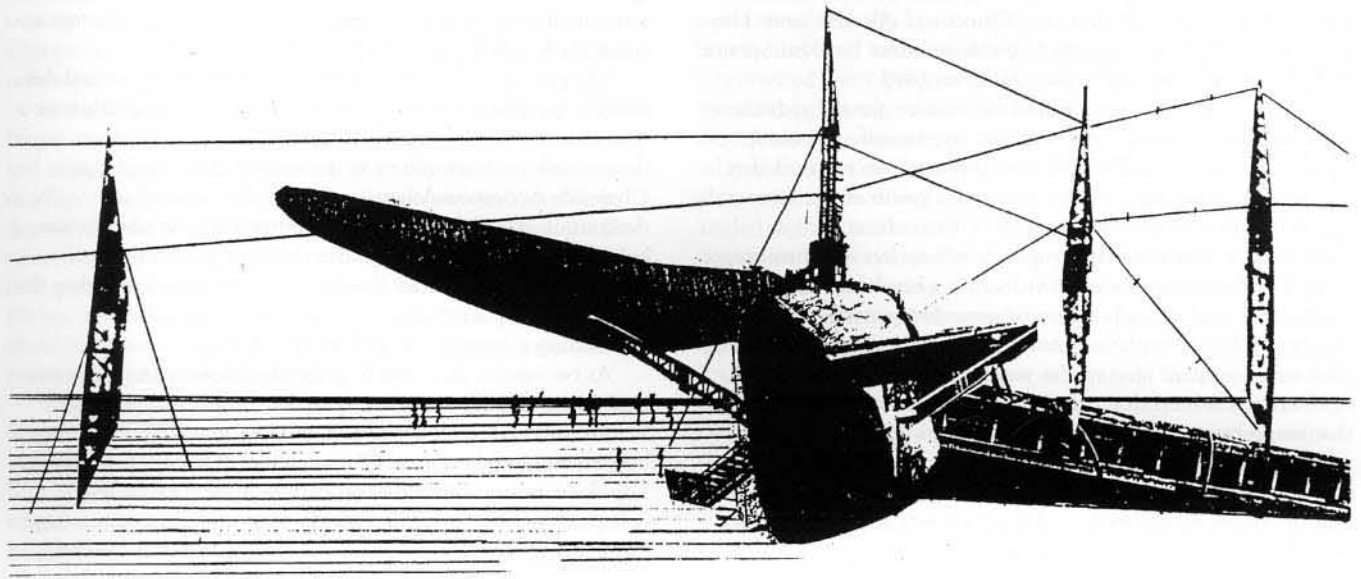
Note This article was originally presented as a talk at The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh in September 1993

The City as a Work of Art 1: Glasgow will be published in mid-December

To order a copy, please contact:

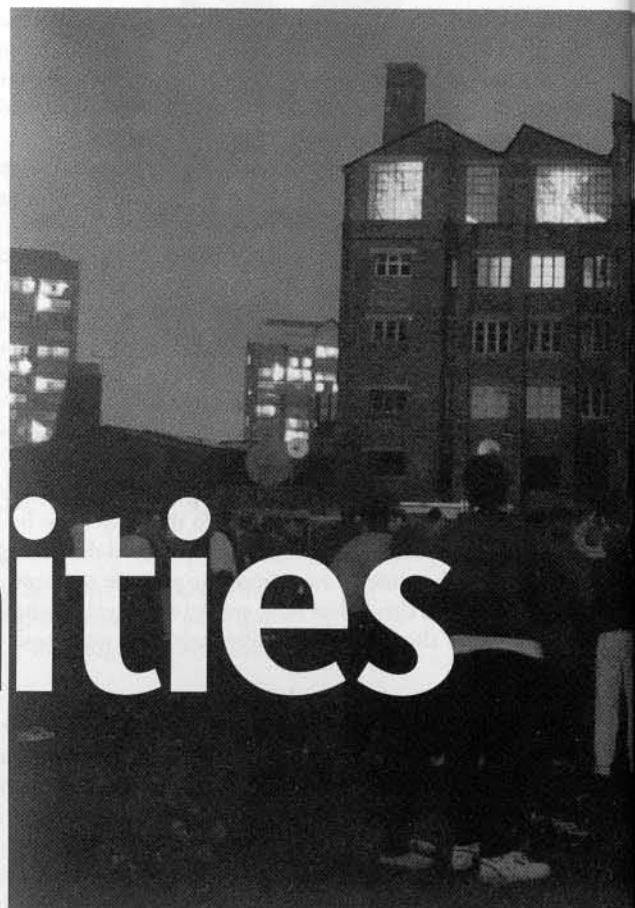
Andrew Guest, Shirgarton House, Kippen, Stirling FK8 3EA

The River & the City Paul Clarke and Alison McCloy



Bonfire of the architectural vanities

Wave



On Sunday 12th September 1993 at 2pm, two 19 storey blocks housing 400 flats in Glasgow's Gorbals District were demolished. The blocks, known officially as the Hutchesontown C Flats, nationally as the Queen



Elizabeth Flats and locally as the 'Queenies,' 'Alcatraz' and 'The Berlin Wall,' were designed by Scottish architect Sir Basil Spence in 1957/58 and opened by the Queen in 1963.

The first residents were full of enthusiasm for the apartments which, luxurious in comparison with the rat-infested, damp Victorian tenements they had moved out of, were regarded at the time by many (mainly architects) as a vision of the future.

Irony must be a by-word for these flats, not squalor as suggested by a national newspaper. A '60s vision of urban utopia turned within the space of 30 years into a black blot on the '90s landscape, a nightmarish reality of grey, dirty, windy corridors, leaking roofs, condensation, dampness, with vandalism and drug addiction prevalent among the youth. Lord Palumbo, Chairman of the Arts Council, described the Queenies as "splendid blocks that could be turned into student accommodation," thereby proposing that students and the working classes are entitled to the same level of squalor. Palumbo was perhaps not fully aware that the tower blocks' proposed function was as people's *homes*

and not as "seminal works of art in the context of public housing." One newspaper recording the event, and Palumbo's remarks, recognised the irony and published a photograph of the Lord's Berkshire manor house beneath the exploding Queenies. They did not, however, include pictures of the various buildings and houses Palumbo 'collects,' or the group of Inner Hebridean Islands he owns.

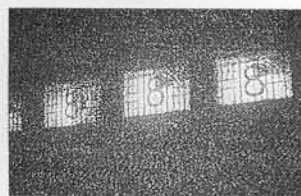
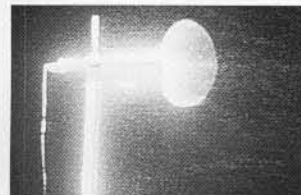
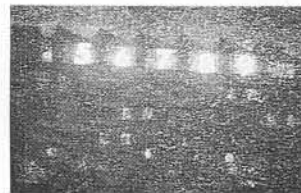
Advance publicity drew the crowds out on a sunny afternoon to witness the entertainment of the explosion, pipers and an 'all-fall-down' demolition mobile disco. The irony was intensified as the Queenies were transformed into a photogenic spectacle for all the family.

Glasgow is no stranger to architectural controversy and this was no exception. One woman was killed by falling debris on a spot outside the exclusion zone, a spot which seemed dangerously close considering the height of the buildings. Clydeside Action on Asbestos opposed the method of demolition (favouring its gradual dismantling) as asbestos was believed to be mixed in with the concrete, which the local Council naturally denied. Further rumours spread regarding the Council's acceptance of the 'cheap demolition option' in contracting a company at half the going price.

As two-and-a-half tons of gelignite detonated and asbestos dust (allegedly) filled the air, cameras—video, still, 88 and 16mm—started to click and roll, in what must have been the best documented event in Glasgow's recent history since the Pope's sermon in Bellahouston Park in 1982. The building collapsed in 14 seconds, leaving the top three storeys intact and dangerously perched on top of a precarious mound of rubble. By all accounts, it was another architectural disaster...



photo: Jim Hamlyn



photos: Peter McCaughey

Six weeks prior to this event and in anticipation of it, Peter McCaughey, a Glasgow based artist, had begun to organise a group of people, video cameras and projectors in what turned out to be of the most stimulating visual arts events seen in Glasgow in recent months.

Fourteen cameras in total were focused on and around the buildings; wide-shot, close-up, sited on the roofs of neighbouring tower blocks, from the top of Queens Park, and on the ground tracking the blocks from below. With a ten-screen outdoor video projection scheduled for ten o'clock that evening over the windows on the top floor of an old mill building adjacent to the flats and visible from a vast wasteland, there was only eight hours to record, edit and project.

Bringing a new consideration to the term 'time-based', this fifteen minute, one-off projection depended upon the euphoria and impact of the main event that same day. Working to a deadline usually associated with TV news coverage, everything depended upon the demolition going ahead as planned, for the camera to return with good clear footage and for the editing and final organisation to be free from any major hiccups or technical hitches. It was a large-scale, public and expensive risk to take, as all work of this nature is, but when it finally comes together it proves to be one worth taking.

The Old Mill housing the projections is an old textile mill from the early Victorian period, c.1817. Irony comes into play once more as a building 176 years old and due for renovation later this year, conveys images of the destruction of its neighbouring buildings, only 30 years old. Does this represent a comment on the current state of architecture or our attitudes towards it?

As an artwork and a spectacle, the success of the projection lay in its direct communication with the audience, refreshingly comprising more locals than art enthusiasts. The imagery relating to a 'real event' in peoples' lives, the large and impressive scale of the piece, and the use of video technology (a medium now familiar to the public) captivated an audience which so often feels antagonistic towards and alienated from so much contemporary art.

The countdown, announced over the Tannoy system, commenced visually from the number 10 downwards across the ten screens. Shots in black and white and in colour of the tower blocks, and head and shoulder shots of the residents being interviewed, were projected. The music (by John Cobban) signalled a growing climax as number boards began their frantic descent and the demolition finally appeared on the screen, relayed from 14 different angles which showed an extraordinary close-up shot revealing the impact of the explosion, a wide-angled stylistic tracking shot and various longshots. The demolition as visual spectacle became manifest and the Queenies took on another dimension and reality, embodying a drama of cinematic aesthetics. Mirroring the roof design of the Old Mill, a triangular 'Toblerone' shape moved across the screens; a simple image relating to the architecture which held the projection and one of the most effective. Finally, as flames lapped across the top floor, the mill ablaze with projected fire, an authoritative voice (Big Brother) announced over the Tannoy system—
"Please clear the area."



Diamanda Galás

THE *articulation* of despair

In the 1950s and '60s, a massive expansion in the scope of vocal composition took place, principally mediated by the voice of the late Cathy Berberian, as exploited by practically every avant-garde composer with the opportunity. Berberian's ability to plunge through sequences of contradictory moods, languages and vocal registers at breakneck pace led inevitably to compositions which, like Luciano Berio's *Passaggio* and *Recital*, dealt with pathologically fragmented states of mind. In retrospect such explorations often



seem somewhat reticent, even polite, and on the other hand certainly raise the problematic nature of this relationship between (female) vocalist and (male) composer.

In the case of **Diamanda Galás**, there is no such problem; her performances stem from an intimate but 'composerly' knowledge of her own highly-trained voice, her subject matter in her new work, *Vena Cava*, from close personal identification with the effects of mental illness, institutionalisation and above all, Aids. The voice in *Vena Cava* is a psychological microscope, examining disjointed verbal fragments, drawing the listener into an internal world whose vertiginous spaces, echoes, distant choruses and razor-sharp cries trace the contours of a mind in disintegration, a body near to extinction. Images of tormented isolation spring readily to mind, the inward cacophony of schizophrenia, sudden episodes of inarticulate rage, the threatening underside of comforting voices, the intrusion of tranquil or horrific memories. But what remains in the mind is the discipline with which this lacerating exposition is set out. There is no sense of an uncontrolled outpouring of emotion; this performance is a composition, its sounds and its structure are *organised*.

But her performances also have an obvious improvisational intensity, and it turns out that her early performing experiences were indeed as a pianist-improviser—in her 1992 work, *The Singer*, the piano reappears as a dark-hued and often harsh partner to her more than usually jazz-inflected vocals, although the voice in other works is 'accompanied' only by a vortex of electronically-generated afterimages of itself.

Before the interview, we spend some minutes prowling around the atrium of her London hotel, searching for a corner out of earshot of the 'restrained' foyer piano, its every note oozing the complacency that Diamanda Galás' work rails untiringly against; her accustomed spot has been commandeered by a certain Bono, whose lunch has just arrived, and his personal Terminator refuses point-blank to ask him to move since apparently he's in a *very* bad mood today. We pass an in-house shop window display of surveillance equipment. We are surrounded by the highly polished debris of privilege, in which Galás seems the only representative of normality...

Diamanda Galás: In the case of *Vena Cava*, I started writing some very basic texts for it, and then I went into the studio and started to improvise with the text—that might mean that one word gets sustained and suspended, and then more words are generated improvisationally. After that I had developed, let's say, a ten-minute section of the piece, and I decided to work with an engineer doing the live signal processing and tape on a daily basis. I had the opportunity to work at The Sanctuary in Philadelphia, where I was able to live and work for a month, so what I would do was spend half the week writing, and then three days of the week working—both in terms of realising preordained material and of improvising new material. And when I say improvising new material, it's not as if I say, well, today I'm going to *improvise*, it's just that it would come as a natural process; you do what you hear, ultimately that's what an improviser *is*. And so I worked in these different ways, and then certainly during rehearsals if I would hear something I might notate it. I don't know how other composers work, but that's how I work—I don't pre-notate everything and then realise it sonically, I will work, just as everyone else, in as many ways as possible to realise something I'm interested in.

So the work-process is part of the identity of each piece? | Yes. Exactly right.

In live performance, if you're touring a piece, obviously it develops to a certain extent from one night to the next—what do you think might influence the differences between each performance? | One of the main things of course is what happens to you right before you go on stage, just what's happened on the street, or whatever you've heard about, or whatever slips into your mind during the performance. Certainly the voice is different every day; in *Vena Cava*, although the voice is processed considerably, and there is the addition of tape material, it's primarily a solo-voice piece—wherever my voice *is* at that moment, is going to determine also what it is that I can do vocally. Obviously the more I can do vocally, the more I can recognise the aural process in it, and so then I can move on from there. That's why I've trained the instrument so much—the voice determines the next direction, it works in a cyclical way with my hearing. Just like any improviser.

You mention the "instrument"—would you say you think of the voice as an instrument, or of the voice as a point of access to something internal?—the mouth as an outlet for something, which is obviously different from playing a violin or a trumpet. | It's the most direct-access medium I have available; I guess I don't mean it as an instrument in terms of instrumental articulation per se, but for lack of a better word I do use the word "instrument." But this instrument is quite a sophisticated one. The nasal cavity is the highest part of it, and the top of the skull, but then you have the mouth and the tongue, and the vocal cords that are activated by the breathing, and the diaphragm, which is the big pumping source of power, so it's quite a huge thing we're talking about when we talk about a vocal instrument.

Do you see it as something which is separate from the rest of your body when you're performing? | No, it takes in everything, and before I sing I'm really doing a lot of exercises with the body, so it's



something that in its perfect state is rushing over the top of my head, like with a discus-thrower.

Do you think you would ever give an unprepared improvisatory performance? Even for instance with other people, since your work has become focused on one person. | I used to do that years ago... my work has become soloistic because I'm more and more aware of my mortality, so I don't want to waste my time. My favourite form of collaboration is working with people who are working for me.

You've gone back recently to using the piano as well as the voice; what struck me was that the vocal style is atonal and chaotic, whereas the piano style is much more harmonically oriented and more organised. | That's because it functions as an accompaniment to the vocal style, whereas if it were left to its own devices, it would go the way of the vocals. I first started out in free improvisation with the piano, not with the voice, so my vocal style has been very much influenced by the experimentation I did as a pianist.

Do you ever find yourself coming up against the limits of what you can use your voice to do? | Yes—that's a most terrifying experience, and that's why I work on the voice as much as I do technically. Because a moment like that is enough to send me into real depression—when you hear something and you can't sing it; if there's any concept of sacrilege that would have to be it.

Is that what the electronic treatments are for? | They're not so that I can do something electronically that I can't do vocally, it's a different timbral domain altogether, like different colours of paint or whatever. Certainly there are moments when I would use, say, a 300 millisecond delay, in conjunction with reverb, to sustain my voice longer than I could possibly do it, but that's not really why I use signal processing. I use it because I'm interested in the distorted sound quality itself.

Maybe creating different types of space around the voice? | Certainly. That was the primary reason why I started with reverberation, incremental changes in reverb, to constantly change what I might have referred to as different psychological spaces, you know, from very intimate to very far away.

So are you controlling that in real time, or is someone else doing it? | Both. I have on occasion used footpedals, and also different voltage-control units so I could change the mix between the reverberated signal, the dry signal and the delayed signal; and giving a preordained time period of, say, three minutes in which the delay time would change from 250 to 3000 milliseconds, and by the time it would get to 2000 we'd use square-wave modulation, so that the vocal sound would go from very operatic and pure to multiphonic noise. Now with the engineers I work with, there's a definite improvisational element which they're contributing, more or less depending on who it is. With Eric Liljestrand in *Vena Cava*, he's contributing quite a lot—he has some brilliant ideas. I love working with really creative engineers, most of whom do their own music as well. I think the word "engineer" is a terribly unfair term. People who are considered "engineers" are usually doing quite a lot of musical work at the same time and have facilitated everyone else's projects with very little credit; so he gets full production credit on my record.

They have better ears than most so-called musicians do. | Don't they. And haven't they sustained musicians' careers, who then

suddenly don't make records any more, when the engineer disappears? All the stuff in *Vena Cava* is vocal sounds, extended through electronic processing, with the exception of sample tapes I introduced, which are banal Christmas carols, Bing Crosby, a lot of different materials that I call trigger-tapes, things that I would have very strong reactions to. Christmas carols invariably induce a sort of suicidal thinking in me, you can hardly help but see the hangman's noose in front of you when Christmas starts. That's nothing particular to me. So it's the very banal and seemingly trivial, which is in point of fact insidious, that triggers this other kind of performance from the soloist.

And you're expressing your own disgust with it? | Well, it's not disgust, it's *fear*. Disgust has a little more distance from an event, but fear doesn't have any at all.

Regarding the positive influences on you, do you think that's all under the skin now, or are you still taking new things on board? | I certainly would say that I'm still pursuing influences; I saw, for example, *The Wild Bunch* by Sam Peckinpah the other day, and loved it. I've been thinking of doing a piece called *Caligula*, and the film influenced that direction quite a lot. I really get inspired a lot by film-makers—because it's a kind of contemporary opera. Certain types of film by, let's say, Pasolini, Peckinpah, Fellini, are really operatic theatre, terribly inspirational to me.

Are you still working from literary models as well? | Oh, definitely. I think probably more so, as a matter of fact. I don't really listen to music that much. I'm doing so much work with sound that, like a lot of composers, the last thing I want to do when I go home is hear some more fucking sound.

One of the obvious things about your performances is that they are depictions of extreme emotional, physical, psychological states—how does that relate to your state when you're performing? | That varies. I think that during certain performances I might be, let's say, really *one* with whatever that emotional state is; and at other times I may be trying to recreate the memory of that in myself, as I've experienced it. Because ultimately there's a certain type of physical control I have to have, in order to do the work. I'm using a rather distant analogy, but it's the same as asking an opera singer to get drunk before s/he plays the role of a drunk, that might be very interesting for them but the audience would be bored to death. That's where the discipline comes in, and a certain 'third party' observation you have to maintain in yourself. To keep it structurally interesting, you still have to look at the whole while you're involved in each part of it. I would say the most important thing for me is to speak honestly, so I don't bore myself or fall asleep on stage, and then if I'm honest in that way there is a probability that some people are going to respond to my work and other people aren't. I'm not really the kind of artist that started by going out into the audience and trying to figure out what everyone wanted before I did it...

But then there is a political dimension to the work. | Oh, certainly, but the differences between the personal and the political, the psychological and the political, the emotional and the political—perhaps those are differences that I'm not too interested in, and I don't know if they *are* that different. First of all, since the performances are extremely emotional, because that's my character, then they probably have a very strong *affect*, so people either love them or hate them, or at least feel somehow moved by them, if only to leave the room—which is still some sort of statement. If something has an affect, then it might have a

political result or manifestation, or someone will act in a certain way as a result of it. You can't define that, you can never know that. But then I would say that, as an activist in a wider sense, my work can only function as part of that activism; and other than that, I do things like try to obtain information for my friends on buyers' clubs as far as medication is concerned, and treatment and data, and then I work in certain caregiving facilities, or play cocktail piano at a veterans' hospital, for people with Aids, and all sorts of other things. I think that there are a lot of different actions a person can take with regard to an epidemic.

When you use words from a liturgical source such as the Old Testament, what is your relationship to them—are they in heavy quotation marks?

| I don't use them irreverently, I don't use them to cast doubt on their veracity, or to be clever; I use them because I think that a lot of the writing, particularly from the Old Testament, is a language of despair, a very articulate language of despair, and it was that which interested me when I saw Psalm 88. It's just really profound writing; the Old Testament was influenced by early Greek writing, the writing of Greek tragedy—for example, the book of Job. And Baudelaire, Corbière and Nerval are also incantational, liturgical writing, which can on occasion serve as a good medium for my work, or at least I feel that way. There are many great writers who I would feel (by virtue of the way they use the language, the propulsion of the language) I wouldn't have the right to approach, because it wouldn't lend itself to any kind of 'musical' interpretation, things that have nothing to do with a sort of incantatory style. That's what I'm particularly looking for. And I always do a certain amount of writing for myself, but more recently I've done more; maybe that's part of a sort of composerly desire for solitude...

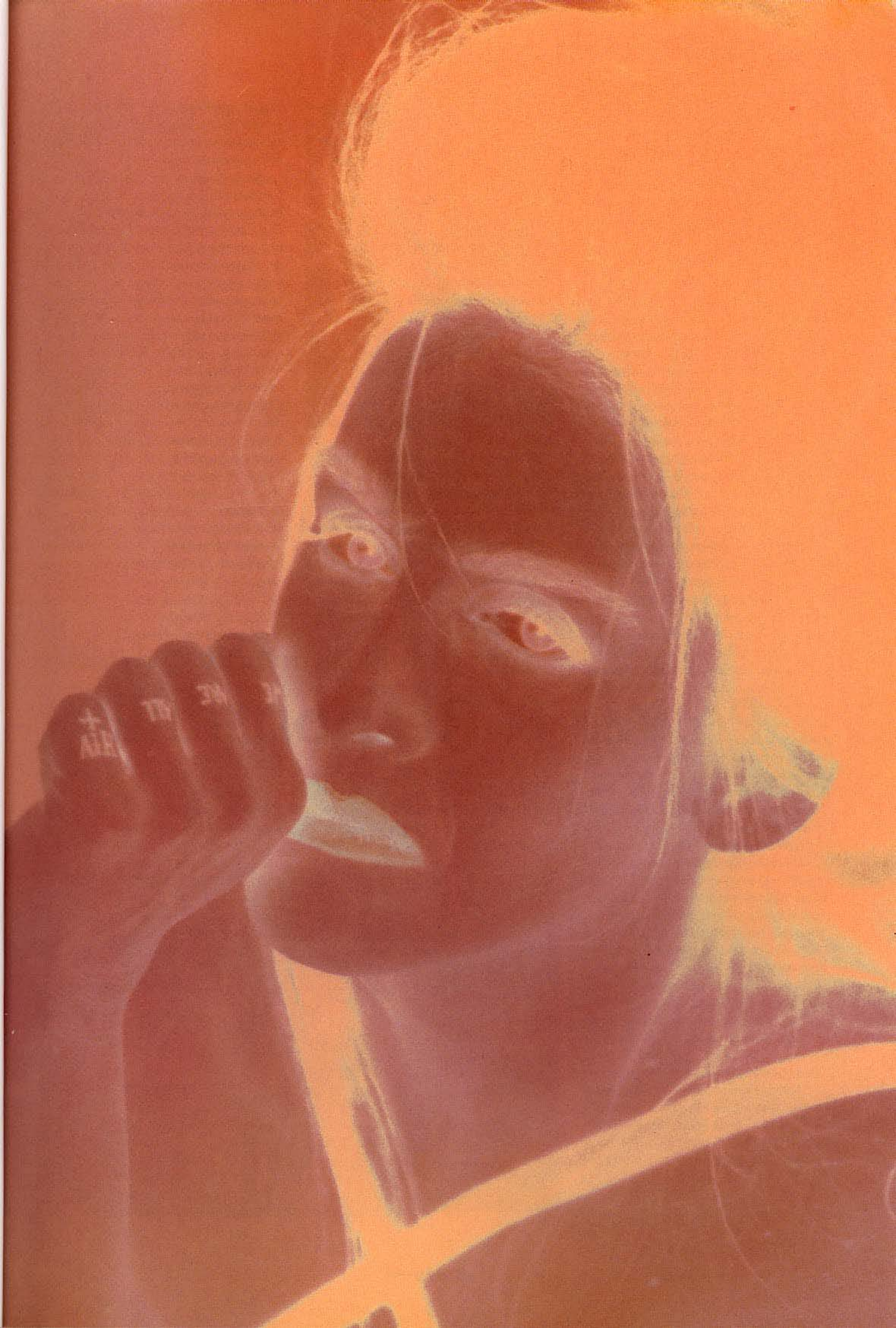
If you're creating your own verbal material, might that have its own independent life outside your performances? | It might. People have asked me to do it independently, and that's slightly wearisome, because then it must sustain itself in writing terms alone, if it's going to be published, and I often don't feel that's really the point of why I'm doing it in the first place. These days, if you have any kind of name at all, people want to publish you, so I'm a bit suspicious of that sort of thing.

Going back to the Psalms, you don't have to look very far in that book to find a kind of anguished looking for God, and that in the middle of the Bible, which is supposedly affirming the existence and beneficence of God, you find that large tracts of the Old Testament are in fact about looking for him and not finding him. | Questioning his existence. That's what's so interesting, for example, about Psalm 88, or 23, or so many of them—"See, O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee, let my prayer come before thee, incline thine ear unto my prayer"—it's like a person who's been buried alive or who's in a completely isolated place, looking for dialogue where none exists, and looking for it *especially* because none exists. There's a theory, I've said it many times, which is that human beings cannot survive without dialogue, so in its absence they will create it. That may be a very naïve point of view, or it may be so obvious it's not worth stating, but nonetheless that's why I refer to this element that is created by despair, whether it's God or whether it's...

...something, anything, outside your own head. | Well, exactly, there's that corny old line that every Satanist dies a Catholic. I wouldn't say that *every* one does, but quite a few have.



...from very intimate
the voice determines the next direction
to very far away
Speak honestly...
whether its God or whether its...



Plans for this symposium arose almost two years ago in discussions between Cal Arts and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, with the events in the wake of the Rodney King affair in 1992 galvanising some aspects of the agenda. Whether you refer to these as 'the riot' or 'the rebellion' has, until recently, signalled your political position in relation to them in LA, a city described as "the most ethnically diverse metropolis in the world."

Tom Lawson, artist and Dean of Fine Arts at Cal Arts provided an initial overview of the symposium in which he stressed the importance of differing perspectives in response to how art institutions shape and frame the debate and how visual culture is produced, presented and received—what he called "looking at the fault-lines of power within the art community." Lawson suggested that, in bringing together arts workers from diverse parts of the visual arts world, the hope was that their differing perspectives—local, national and international—would enable a better understanding of how current states of play in the art world intersect with events in the rest of the world. As Lawson put it, how art could be something of value to our lives, rather than to our wallets.

David Avalos (artist, San Diego), in the panel presentation *Access: Institutional Power and Decision-Making*, was entirely cynical about what he called the 'Unitutions' (i.e., so-called Universal Institutions) ability to engage in a fundamental questioning or re-definition of their decision-making process. As he saw it, their inability to cross the tracks, let alone the borders, disenfranchised whole sections of the public which, despite contributing to their existence, felt excluded from these institutions and what they valorised.

Avalos saw his strategy in combating the perceived disinterest of Museums/Institutions as one which operated at the intersection of Public Space, Informational Space (The Media), and Civic Space. For him the term "Public Art" must refer to "an engagement of the social imagination."

There was a call in the discussion that followed for more radical options; a commitment to change from *within* established institutions; to allow power to move through the matrix rather than sitting at the centre. Optimism about change and new strategies was inevitably balanced by scepticism about institutions' unwillingness

to give up something in order to do something else. The notion of *giving up* certain kinds of power would, of course, be met with resistance.

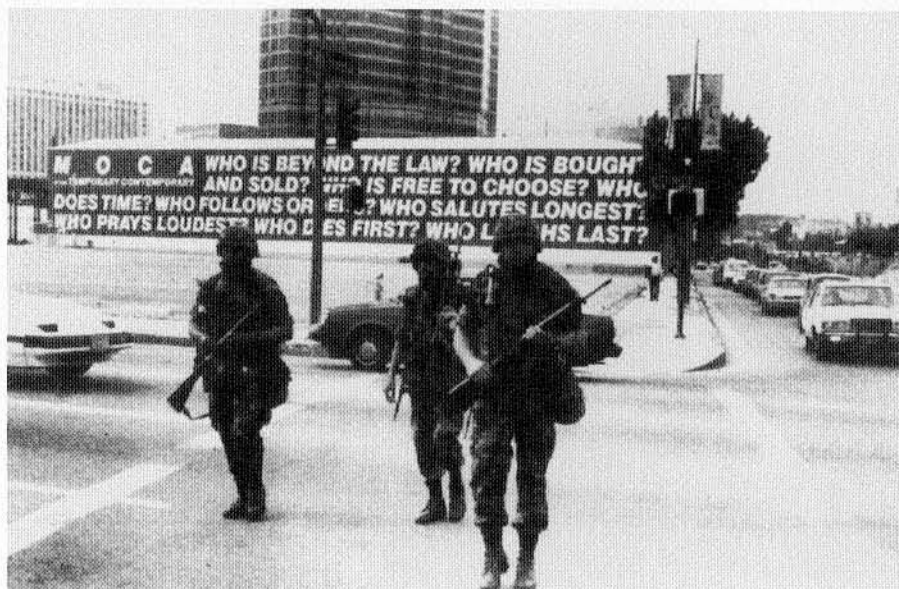
Gerardo Mosquera (independent curator and critic, Havana, Cuba) contributed to the panel *Audience and Community*, and focused on the relationship of power to the trans-cultural circulation of art. He saw this circulation as describing equations of power in terms of the cultural hegemony of international curators linked to major institutions and sponsors. Not only do global shows take for granted universal values, but in speaking on behalf of the 'other' culture they were seen to be somehow legitimating it. Where **James Clifford** had spoken of the West's restless desire to 'collect the world,' Mosquera believed the West was now intent on 'curating the world,' a wholly one-sided operation. His argument was that the major art shows 'canned exhibitions,' like fast food, made more localised museums and institutions complacent, and ignored the 'abandoned audience' that made up most of humankind. Nor did he see that the

art institutions and cultural change

Power & Responsibility;

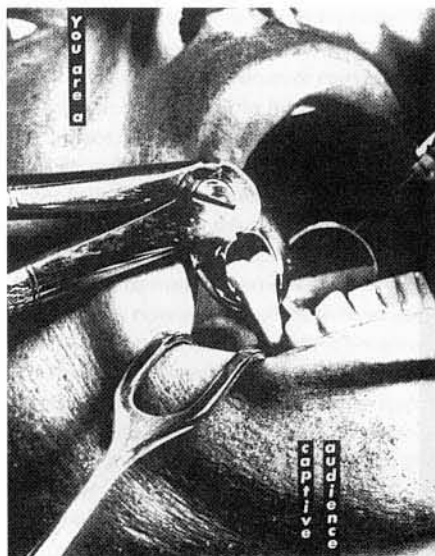
Sam Ainsley reports on a major Artists' Symposium held in Los Angeles during October 1993

National Guard patrolling downtown LA photo: Gary Leonard



universal blame the Third World placed on Imperialism was sufficient excuse. He felt rather that the Third World must become more active, engage in more diversified fund-raising and insist on more cooperation and joint projects. Mosquero stated that such networking between local, national and international organisations would enable other cultures to circulate their own art in their own terms. The current globalization of art was seen to be from and for the North and there was a suggestion that this system of "intercultural czars" needed to be replaced by multi-cultural teams of local curators, advisers and artists. Mosquera concluded by stating that if we cannot change the existing structures for disseminating art then it is up to art activists to invent new ones.

In the discussion that followed this panel many people saw the 'international' as being pitted against the 'local' or 'regional'—local artists being seen as naively political, international artists as more sophisticated. A two-pronged approach in democratising existing structures and building new ones not based on Western paradigms was felt to be both necessary and overdue. *Distribution and Circulation of Ideas* posed four very different strategies in relation to this topic. **Olivier Debroyse** (novelist and cultural critic, Mexico City) saw the need for nothing less than a complete re-structuring of the art world in its ideological, geopolitical and superstructural aspects. Debroyse suggested that a strengthening of ties between artists, critics, curators and historians could extend the U.S. multi-cultural debate into other regions through the use of atomised networks and the delegation of curatorial powers. **Carole Ann Klonarides** (media arts curator, Long Beach Museum of Art) foresaw the idea of museums in all our pockets (through digital storage) and believed that the relative portability of video technology allowed it to operate in non-traditional sites and to facilitate contact with and between marginalised communities. **Tony Arefin** (creative director, *I.D.* magazine NYC) was one of those who felt that 'high-end' equipment presently excluded many from participation and that the relative cheapness of printed material gave far greater accessibility. **Louise Neri** (senior editor, *Parkett* magazine) took a different stance entirely, describing *Parkett* as the "art-world's best kept secret," a publication targeted at a specialised audience of artists, curators, critics and arts administrators. Neri stated that she didn't believe in "re-inventing the wheel," that museums and books were not obsolete but that we simply expected too much of them, begging the question of what 'too much' might imply.



Barbara Kruger

Parkett's in-depth analysis of the genealogy of artists' production and the magazine's seductive quality was, for her, only one valid strategy among many for the distribution and circulation of ideas, despite its relatively small circulation (6000-8000 worldwide). Most participants felt that the widest possible circulation of ideas was vitally important, though some believed that the number of people reached was not necessarily an indication of the success of any given project.

The final session, *Public and Private: Spheres of Influence* again posited a variety of strategies and responses from both individual and institutional stances. **Martha Fleming** and **Lyne LaPointe** (artists, Montreal) make site-specific installations in abandoned or disused public buildings, dealing with "the emotional memory of sites." Fleming questioned the 'public-ness' of the city square, equating areas like this with social control and surveillance. In filling public squares with what she termed "distracting devices" (lights, animation, and 'public art'), authority seeks to evacuate these public spaces of any sense of intimacy; and these sites therefore speak to her of a "docile constituency." Fleming and LaPointe see intimacy and subjectivity as resistance; for them, artworks dealing with so-called private issues, those supposedly apolitical, have in fact the political potential to induce solidarity with other human beings. They view intimacy as a weapon to oppose or destroy this 'public' hegemony. **Nathan Braulick** and **Lynne Sowder** (curators, Y-Core, Chicago) by contrast see themselves as engaged in cultural projects under corporate sponsorship, an uneasy position in an area where the corporate, social and private worlds collide.

'Cause marketing' is a relatively new phenomenon even in the US, and despite the uneasy bedfellows of art and commerce, Y-Core believe that the results, in terms of public awareness, debate and financial support for these issues are worthwhile. **Tom Finkelppearl** (Director, *Percent for Art Program*, NYC) saw the issue of 'public and private' as primarily an issue about class, 'community' being a codeword for working class as opposed to the elite, who are not categorised as a 'community.' He cited many oppositions between public and private (some peculiar to the US) to show how the term 'public' was associated with the poor and disadvantaged. At least one of the problems facing artists (and curators like himself dealing with public money) was how to negotiate this difficult terrain and the class conflicts it threw up. **Felix Gonzales-Torres** (artist, NYC), by way of contrast, embarked on a stinging indictment of contemporary America's economic, social and political health as indicated by statistical information. "The industry of hate, ignorance and fear," as Torres called the fundamentalist Christian empire in the US, having lost its targets of 'the evil empire' and abortion, had now turned its guns on the "spectre of homosexuality." The landmark judgement in 1986, *Bowers v. Hardwick*, where the state ruled that 'the bed' is a site of public interest, declared illegal certain sexual practices between consenting adults in private. Many artists like Gonzales-Torres have taken up this issue of 'public vs. private' (and the State's attempted control of what is private) in the artistic domain rather than have the battle fought solely in legal terms.

The issue of power-sharing and the roles and responsibilities of artists, curators and critics is not just a problem within the West, but also in terms of how we in the West negotiate these issues in relation to other cultures. Symposia rarely come up with any answers to the complex problems facing art and artists, but what they do allow for is an opportunity for wide debate and discussion that might otherwise not occur. This symposium also revealed the importance of offering some models (however flawed) of what is being done, or might be done in a variety of contexts—local, national, international—by people who are 'active' in the art world. Many of the audience's criticisms were directed at panel members, suggesting they either do more or do something entirely different. Gonzalez-Torres responded by quoting Che Guevara's statement: "Our trench is our trench and we work from there"—what are you doing?

Before The Kiss: Beban & Horvatic



Burner Stewart Wilson photo Mark Slattery



F/X Plotter Tony Oursler



Burner

Stewart Wilson

Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston
Sept–Oct 1993

Before The Kiss

Breda Beban & Hrvoje Horvatic

Prema Arts Centre, Glos.
Oct–Nov 1993

I arrived at Preston station en route for London, there's no left luggage, this is bomb country. I struggled with a bag full of heavy paperwork. Perhaps this trivial difficulty affected my perceptions—you know how it is? I walked past a charming display of country style chintzes draped over farmhouse pine chests in Debenhams. Preston is a city still trying to forget its ignominious industrial decline.

At the Harris Museum and Art Gallery, I walked out of bright autumn sunshine into a darkened room. Stewart Wilson's *Burner* first confronts the viewer with a macho column of video decks proudly displaying their status, tape addresses blinking. Was this aimless technophilia or a gesture foregrounding the means of production? The leaflet tells us that cables leading from the tower represent a fuse, so the hardware fetish is in fact enslaved in the cause of realism. I don't like these helpful prescriptions, but I followed the fuse into the second chamber, Wilson's intentions eluding me.

Burner's pyramid of screens stood with its back turned. I walked around. *Burner* burnt. A large fire constructed from the tiled fragments of other fires, wisps of smoke, glowing embers, sparks. A bonfire that's all edge. I liked the tension between its dramatic construction and the subtle

Dummies, Dolls & Poison Candy Cigarettes, Flowers & Videotape

Tony Oursler

Icon Gallery, Birmingham &
Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool
Oct–Nov 1993

Beyond Destination

Installations by South Asian artists

Icon Gallery, Birmingham Oct–Nov 1993

Photography and the moving image have shared the task, abandoned by painting at the end of the 19th century, of exploring the nature and possibilities of perception. In these two shows, linked by their coincidence in time and space at the Icon Gallery, add the common concern of the video revolution with the problem of access: the question,

surfaces of the screens; an unrestrained dramatic gesture would have been over-indulgent.

Does an artist re-present fire without a sense of its resonances? Playing with fire; the oil wells of Kuwait, funeral pyres, camp fires, Madonna and candles and Willem Dafoe; charcoal burners (responsible for deforesting much of Britain, hundreds of years before we decided other countries couldn't fuel their development through deforestation); the Moscow White House in flames. I thought of all these things before visiting *Burner*.

Peculiarly, the installation itself succeeded in removing all these resonances, in emptying the image. Perhaps this was the intent, to exert an overriding decorative control of the images, burning them off, reducing them to pattern, *reductio ad absurdum*? But perhaps for Wilson it is a question of elevating the image to pattern, liberating it from its connotations; perhaps such a strategy reflects a new maturity for video work. Perhaps a strategic evacuation of meaning is necessary to avoid co-option by history? Or by the popular mass and its power brokers, forever lurking in the wings? Perhaps *Burner* has the power to remove years of cultural encrustation and liberate a mythic contemplation of elemental Fire. Should it try?

At reset one was left with a grid of white noises, each screen a different pastel shade defined by the colour balance of the monitor, the technology effortlessly recapturing the space to great effect.

Beban & Horvatic's *Before the Kiss* at the Prema Arts Centre occupied very different territory. Three translucent gel banners carried projections of both the artists on

tape and, in certain positions, the viewer. Whereas *Burner* fetishised its pile of heavy metal television tubes, Beban & Horvatic's translucent banners, slit to further disrupt the surface, appeared intent on using texture and scale to liberate their video tapes from television references.

By incorporating the viewer into the piece it was tempting to conclude that *Before The Kiss* made comment on surveillance, now a cliché of the videoscape. However, as one moved around, it became clear that the viewer's involvement was nearer to that of the child jumping up and down outside an electronics store, watching itself captured by a camcorder for sale in the window.

The projections of the artists themselves featured an inconclusive series of almost offhand gestures. Despite the erotic, romantic overtones of the title, the taped gestures endlessly reconstructed and stretched the moment before the kiss to an extent that ultimately diffused any voyeuristic attraction. Do I mean it was boring? I don't know. The viewer's attention was focused onto his/herself's presence on the screens. The installation invited the viewer to share a narcissistic pleasure with the artists. And it is exactly at this point that video surveillance returns—perhaps its anti-democratic nature as a tool of corporate power is only one side of the coin. As a means of control, video surveillance is certainly less effective than our political paranoia would have it. It could be argued on the available evidence that social control is more and more dysfunctional the more it retreats behind remote technologies. Do we all enjoy the massive increase in video surveillance, is it a guilty secret, a reflection of a collective narcissism?

As the viewer explores these pleasures, just like the child at the television store window, he or she joins the absent artists, two time frames merge within one elegantly dissected space. Have Beban & Horvatic created a time slip? Does art have that kind of power? I remembered a glossy black limo cruising past early settlers in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*.

In common with other installations by Beban & Horvatic, *Before The Kiss* is open, inviting the viewer to make links, to construct value. If they are optimists Beban & Horvatic hope to help the viewer link elements of lives that may previously have been separated, a poetic function. The difficulty is that their work requires a presumption that art is important, that it is capable of important things. Whilst it might be argued that such a state is worth striving for, its existence is not safely presumed.

Beban & Horvatic's installation work escapes the history of the television screen at a moment when the TV screen itself is at the centre of unprecedented global struggles for whole continents' hearts and minds. And in the late 20th century these hearts and minds are simply the index of market penetration. Barry Diller's QVC home shopping channel is the prime bidder for the sole remaining independent major in Hollywood, Paramount. On the other side of the globe Rupert Murdoch, moving beyond government, has bought access to India and China through his acquisition of Star TV, an enormous satellite audience stitched together by black market dish wallahs cabling up 100 shanties at a time. Is it too early to abandon critical analysis of the aura of the box?

Bob Last

whose perception? But each show subsumes the access issue under the broader terms of the conditions of possibility of perception in the contemporary world. Each, in its own way, addresses a globalising culture proper to both the electronic image and our time in history. For each, perception becomes a question of identity, and the problem of access is then entirely subordinated to the perplexities of millennial identity.

For **Tony Oursler**, core to this nexus of unanswerable questions and incommunicable answers is the way in which perception is dependent upon its construction. But the banal observation that perception is formed and controlled within regimes of vision is only the beginning of his analysis, which renders it complex by searching in the biological grounds of

identity. On the one hand, he points to the dependence of perception on states of mind which are themselves fundamentally drug-induced. Not alone by self-administered recreational drugs, but by the designer carcinogens and psychotropics of processed and packaged foods and proprietary medicines, the debris of accidental and deliberate environmental spillage, and, in a metaphorical leap of some richness, by the designed and psychotropic environment of the TV. On the other hand, he can indicate the mutual implication of global enterprise, global media and commodity dependent selfhood in the framing of whatever's the opposite of an integrated system: a disintegrated culture.

Downstairs at the Ikon, the work in *Beyond Destination* simultaneously celebrates

and diffuses the notion of a video culture proper to South Asian women of the diaspora. Celebrates in the sense that, in conjunction with other work celebrated in Birmingham's festival of South Asian Arts, notably the eclectic *Transition of Riches* show at the City Galleries, it invokes the interplay of two modes of traditional cultural practice, the ironic stances of the Western (post)modern and the open-endedness of the (several) South Asian traditions evoked by artists. In that celebration, then, there's a challenge to either mode of tradition in that neither owns a space for women's work. The celebration is the work of unearthing such a space. It revolves, many times, about a restructuring of modernity, as globalising phenomenon, in the forms and counterintuitive productions of the local,

expressed, most often in the single monitor works, as poetry and ritual.

But the invention of rituals—that mode of cinematic practice associated with Germaine Dulac or with Maya Dären—reveals more than ever the flaws and difficulties of the search for, and more oppressively the assertion and demands of, identity in the period in which we live. What almost all these works seem to share is a distrust of the existing rituals, but at the same time a distrust of that distrust. The artists return, in many different ways and in layers and tangents and folds of style, semantics, language and bodily presence, to the narratives and daily cultures of the South, but always to move ever deeper into them, searching out the grains of a different difference.

Two installations dominate the show. **Shaheen Merali** shows a version of the artist's beautiful and powerful *Going Native*, whose deck-chairs and video projection positions the viewer in the guilty paradox of the tourist gaze. **Sutapa Biswas**, best known for her paintings and, more recently, for photographic installations of haunting and saddening impact, shows a two-monitor, floor-mounted installation which juxtaposes landscape and the rhythms of rowing, the gestures of a woman's hands. Subtle and beautiful, indeed unusually unafraid of beauty, the work is exploratory, producing, in this viewer, an emotional climate for which I have no name.

Many of the single monitor works installed as a temporary videotheque pick up on themes of gesture as identity, on tourism and displacement, on the body in the landscape. Many move through ritual, and in doing so disseminate a form of viewing the world that has everything to do with a new perception: **Maya Chowdry's** *Monsoon* in colours of rust and bleached oceans; the staccato textured screens of **Alia Syed's** fractured narrative, turned and tossed between Urdu sound and English titles; **Gitanjali's** essayistic, rambling, circuitous network of interweaving travelogues that establishes, over its 50 minutes, something of the grounds for

the family narratives and cultures of remembrance and forgetting so characteristic of exile and migration; several titles echoing the urgency of finding specific spaces for Indian lesbians—the Other's Other Other—notably **Shani Mootoo's** *Wild Woman in the Woods*, whose melodramatic POVs and zooms give way to a momentary community (for me, though polished, the weakest tape, but then I'm not the best audience, and am most interested in the issue of perception).

Throughout the issue of looking, how to look, how to order the business of looking, how to frame and compose within the frame, edit, superimpose and orchestrate the intricate choreographies of pixels in such a way as to invoke and evoke the passage of light, the organisation of vision: these issues are the most pressing, since the question of access is also, and always, the question, *access to what?* In this case, the proposition seems to be: access to an improved apparatus for making, one that articulates sound and image, that gives an unusual weight to the textural qualities of the moving image. It's curious how many of the tapes rely on verbal language, on English specifically.

That, of course, is both symptomatic of a diaspora which, begun under the aegis of the British Empire, is upheld and disseminated in a global network dominated by the North American anglophone imperium (indeed several of the tapes, and Biswas' installation, originate in the Banff Centre in the Canadian Rockies). But that language is itself in imminent danger of self-destruction through ossification, a process beautifully encapsulated in **Alnoor Dewshi's** *Latifah and Himli's Nomadic Uncle*, and its concluding image, apposite for Oursler too, of a starlight cascade that turns out to be a handful of flung rice. Moral for the review of two shows: it is already too late to cling to identity, but too early to pretend it's of no importance. The journey through identity to sociality, that's the current task.

Sean Cubitt

Shaheen Merali *Going Native* photo Sean Halligan



Finnegans Wake

by [TEN 28] / Process

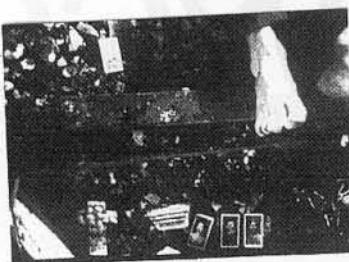
Tramway, Glasgow

8–11 Oct 1993

This is the monument that you keep meaning to visit, as it's said to be *important* and might be *life enhancing*, so let's start on a note of gratitude for having it brought back into our midst. The four performances on consecutive evenings—8 to 11 October—honour a historic praxis in James Joyce's life, being the dates, eighty-nine years ago, of his elopement from Dublin with Nora Barnacle and, three days later, the plunge into union out of the Old Sow Ireland's sight and earshot in friendly neutral Zurich. I was there on consummation night, just as the sun exited stage left—for as *Ulysses* is about a day, *Finnegans Wake* is a night piece. This distinction is asserted by advancing the commencement of the programme by two minutes each evening to keep up with the sunset.

The company takes its title from 28 October, the date in 1992 predicted by a Korean augur for the end of the world. It was launched at the start of that year by performance artist **Ken Davidson**, actor **Tam Dean Burn**, and **John Cobban**, sound and lighting designer. This, their first production, has been in continuous preparation for 22 months.

The piece is played in that part of the Tramway usually dedicated to static exhibition; as a stage it is an agrophobe's treat, 57 metres deep, 15 wide or thereabouts, not so much a platform for declamation as a landscape to get lost in. And that indeed is what happens: Mr Joyce (played by Tam Dean Burn), though a solitary presence, is anything but a central figure in this composition; a persistent loiterer who is nonethemore accessible to us for all his constancy. Indeed *spot the actor* could well be the strategy here, so self-effacing is he, even when not actually obscured by obstacles. Not a word out of him either, anything he has to say will come pre-prepared out of massive speaker stacks in the four corners of the auditorium. What you get is what you see, sprightly and silent on bare feet, two-piece-suited for every occasion—dapper in tan, later grave in black, sometimes angelic in white feather harness, but always the fetishist's moustache, the acid bath murderer's wire framed specs and the rabbinical homburg. T.D. Burn is a nifty navigator of this hazard strewn concrete desert, a great scatter of books and bottles and plastic models of the Eiffel Tower with some heaps of sand for the Wicklow Mountains at the beyond end of things. We know it's a landscape, for it has a garden-



centre potted tree placed downwind of the mountains. We know it is downwind, for when the action begins, a pall of white smoke rising behind the Wicklows drifts like a great birdwing over the tree and on towards the audience, thoughtfully stopping short of asphyxia and the front row of the stalls. Throughout the first episode—*Silence*—Mr Joyce in fading light prowls his territory, rearranges props, slumbers and fidgets by turns at his paperstrewn desk and prepares for the assault of sound and light which will fill the next six acts. And that's it, really, so far as summary can decently go, for the worth of the piece is in events ill-served by verbal analysis. Oh well, all right then.

The geometry of the production is a strong frame holding the vast space in order. The main lighting is a line of powerful floods and spots suspended from the roof at the centre of the space, running with the long axis from front to back, intensely coloured from deep cobalt to violet, red, orange, yellow and green as they extend from front of house to the farthest wall. Thus *Finnegans Wake* gets to include *Finnegans Rainbow*. White light, used sparingly, comes from sources placed low in what would be the wings of a conventional theatre. Mr Joyce gets to wield a huge portable flood, a bucket of instant sunshine wired to the mains, at moments when an act of revelation is forced upon him.

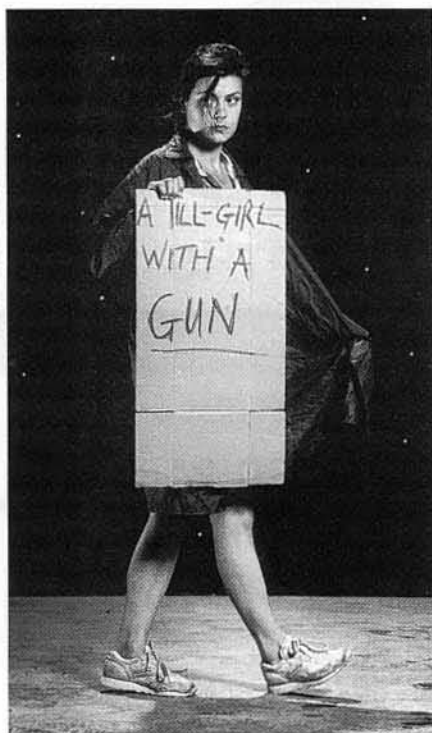
There are four batteries of speakers at the outer angles of the auditorium. The sound is all prerecorded, speech crossing and overlapping not just right and left, but front and back, and diagonally. The opening sounds are an invocation to order and harmony, an orchestral fumbling in search of *A*, repeated six times with intervals. The performance ends four and a half hours later with the final chord, perfectly assembled, of the *Liebostod* motif which closes Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, a dangerous choice for an ending which nevertheless avoids bathos by some miracle. In between, the vocal and musical textures are rich: surreal monologues spliced with popular songs, sputtering pre-1920 wax cylinders and digitally cool synthetic crescendi, meticulously assembled by John Cobban.

Despite the investment of technical skill and fastidious geometry, the production failed to hold the audience in the kind of thrall (however grudging) that confirms the authority of any theatrical production: the last two hours saw a breach of the playing area by members of the audience, driven to curiosity by boredom and the numb-bum condition, to examine the props, rifling the papers on Mr Joyce's desk while he was otherwise engaged in digging a grave for himself in the mountains. This, however, is to be expected at durational performances and even more so when they occur so rarely in Glasgow; Paris audiences in the late '70s were having difficulty keeping their cool with Robert Wilson's four hour marathons.

What lingers in recalling *Finnegans Wake* at the Tramway is a paradox: a big investment of time and space, discipline, research and respect for the subject matter, met by scant attendance and thinly veiled indifference to the beauty of the piece, its generosity and rightness. Mr Joyce wouldn't have asked for more.

Julian Gibb

12am: Awake and Looking Down: Forced Entertainment



National Review of Live Art

ICA, London

October 1993

After a two year absence, and now uprooted from the late Third Eye Centre in Glasgow to the ICA in London, the *National Review of Live Art* returned, with six days of performances, installations, video programmes, art debates and a two-day conference dedicated to American and British cultural identity within the arts.

The two-day conference on *State of the Art* brought together multi-cultural artists from both sides of the Atlantic. Controversial questions of race, gender, politics and other issues relevant to contemporary communities, generated disputes and disagreements that added a refreshing zest to the atmosphere of the festival.

Since the political and social agendas have dramatically changed within the past few years—and since the NRLA “is dealing with more than issues of visual art, theatre, movement and text,” as Nikki Millican, the Artistic Director, stated—the focus on cultural identity provided an essential and overall more substantial core to this year’s programme. Retaining its previous structure, the emphasis of the NRLA is on the promotion of new work. Twenty three artists, selected from regional platforms throughout Britain (Alexander Harvey, Cindy Cummings and others), were placed in proximity to previous platform artists (Annie Griffin, Forced Entertainment, Ralf Ralf, Gillian Dyson and David Izod, *et al*), and international artists (Judith Jackson, Denise

Uyehara, *The Hittite Empire*, Mehmed Sander and Pomo Afro Homos) who represented the ‘diverse cultures’ of the USA.

Differences within the conceptual or formal nature of programmed works was evident and perhaps inevitable, given that the past decade has been stimulated by disputes and arguments concerning the nature and borders of live art, disagreements between theatre and visual art parameters and their assimilation within hybrid art.

The commissioned installation by Pepon Osorio, an American artist of Puerto Rican roots, comprised three separate pieces: a bicycle pasted all over with spangles and cheap plastic objects representing swans, angels, palm trees, human figures, etc.; a triptych portrait of Maya, symbol of the Spanish inquisition; and a number of framed identical photographs of an open mouth decorated with little plastic figurines and miniature childrens toys, an emotional display of symbols that refer to the transformed notions of Latino identity, both personal and cultural.

Headless Turtleneck Relatives by Denise Uyehara (writer and performance artist, who is a third-and-a-half generation Japanese-American)—concerned feelings of alienation, displacement and the forced search for self-identity within the multi-cultural system of values. The performance was based on personal experience and involved a fragmentation of narrative text, dance and

music, which revealed with humour and directness the story of a grandmother’s life ended by suicide.

Problems of personal identity which questioned issues of a social, political and environmental nature and placed in the “realm of community ritual,” informed some Afro-American art—such as Judith Jackson’s *The N*gg*r Cafe* and *Hittite Empire*’s two shows. The ritualistic theme was also apparent in the two pieces by British platform artist Alexander Harvey, *The Fix* and *The Kiss of Life*, 5 and 9 hours long respectively. The artist was immobile, frozen in his posture, both a subject and an object, a victim and an oppressor, disclosing insecurity and shattered identity.

Forced Entertainment’s commissioned installation *12am: Awake and Looking Down* was a prolonged version of *Emmanuel Enchanted*. Five people locked in a gallery space for eleven hours—with an endless amount of jumble sale clothes and cardboard signs bearing identities—were involved in a combination of acted/improvised sequences dealing with the experience of illusion and reality in art and life. Borders of selfhood, misleadingly defined (or undefined) and confused by the outer/inner, public/private divides, explored the fluidity of visual and verbal languages that frame identity within the realm of the invisible, between reality and dream, expression and non-expression.



Headless Turtleneck Relatives Denise Uyehara photo Chuck Stollard

The issues of identity were brought to the forefront in all the artworks from the USA, whether in a direct form of verbal articulation that stemmed from theatre background, or more abstract variations of the theme in dance performance. This was the case with Cindy Cummings, dancer, choreographer and American ex-patriot, who in *i luuv merica goddaammit* tries to express “dislodged fragments of [her] own culture and history, from which arises a demystified picture of that culture: a culture that so desperately wants to believe the words and visual images spoon-fed to it through the media.”

Homophobia and the identity crisis within the gay community were the subjects of Pomo Afro Homos’ (Post-modern African American Homosexuals) *Dark Fruit*, a performance in seven acts, combined various stories from African-American gay experience which were presented with parody, sarcasm and humour. The work culminated in a series of letters addressed to various people, among others to Hilary and Bill Clinton. A redefinition of identity, both cultural and personal, and a deconstruction of worn-out notions of community and culture, was demanded in this work as a strategy to fight prejudice and the hypocrisy of institutionalised concepts favoured by media and social sciences.

If multi-cultural American art appears as an act of resistance, it is because the history of art has refused to acknowledge cultural differences and the authenticity of non-European influences. Performance—being a vital practice in American culture with its predominantly interventionist, spiritual, and healing tradition—opens the experimental scopes of art to an audience wider than the avant-garde art world, and addresses the controversial ethical issues where they most need to be addressed.

Now, at the close of the 20th century—when avant-garde art, after decades of self-definitions bound up with experimental innovations and the established structure of social values, begins to face a crisis—the shift from structural to contextual has again become important.

This year’s NRLA highlighted discrepancies in art practice that, as in the past, will hopefully have an impact on emerging art in this area. One should bear in mind, however, that live art is not so much an object of art in itself—which remarks on the schizophrenic fragmentation of contemporary cultures—as an experience shared by performers and spectators, informed communication of the kind which has been largely absent from British live art interventions.

Ewa I. Gaciag

Outpost

Fashion, Architecture, Taste Collective Group

During Edinburgh Festival
Aug–Sept 1993

Outpost was a one-off unfunded project, conceived by FAT (Fashion, Architecture, Taste collective group), who produce cross-disciplinary art despite the dictates of the present art market. Its objective is to “attempt a re-definition of the possibilities of art practice and art production beyond the gallery.” The artists involved produced at least 100 ‘multiples’ of their artwork each the size of a business card accompanied by a separate card bearing their signature; each artist contributed £5 towards distribution and named a price for their signature. The artworks, distributed through dispensers in selected venues across Edinburgh, detailed how to ‘authenticate’ the freebie (by purchasing the signature at the outpost sales desk in Edinburgh College of Art). Empty albums were on sale for collectors to ‘hang’

their authenticated works of art and to encourage the collection of other works and signatures to, in the words of the album, “make their own unique individually curated catalogue or exhibition.”

Outpost offered the artists involved an alternative to the oppressive art market, governed by the gallery system and the charming tastes of bourgeois art collectors. This was an opportunity for graduates and young artists (mostly from London) to exploit the system that usually exploits them, to create cheap neo-conceptual art that acknowledges the commercial art industry existing within post-capitalist cultural structures. The production of multiple copies of the art and signatures highlighted the hypocrisy of a high-art, low-art system of evaluation and exposed the naked value of art as the signature.

The most impressive artworks successfully amalgamated commerce and art, without resorting to the familiar pop-art ethic, by parodying the status of the signature, whether hand-written or

3 Projects / 3 Talks

Ross Sinclair, Craig Richardson & Edwin David

Transmission Gallery, Glasgow Sept 1993

With the exhibitions running for only five days, these events were primarily an occasion for the audience to meet with the artists, hear them talk and hopefully engage in a discussion.

Ross Sinclair’s approach in *We Don’t Love You Any More*, was to use the opportunity as a chance to experiment with what he regards as divergent components in his work. Combining text, found images, audio, video and performance have developed this work somewhat from past concerns with intertextual references within marketing, into less transparent devices of cultural alienation. Still present is the guiding hand of Barthes’ ‘enclitic language’—the paralysis of real meaning effected by the singular reading of dominant narratives—and that old prankster spirit of mocking the underlying assumptions of popular imagery.

The dominant feature of the work was a text made with overlapping stencils of opposite colours, reading like a convoluted, rambling paranoia. The question is, whose? Was it the voice of angst, betrayal, conspiracy or rebellion; from a personal perspective (an interior monologue) or some communique from Kafkaesque authorities? Casually interspersed with the text was a tacky assemblage of posters with lurid themes of soft-core porn, superstar rock,

Hollywood blockbusters, marijuana and so on. Although these had no direct illustrative relationship to the text, they set out a background atmosphere, a climate of adolescence and its notoriously eager consumption of such mass produced images of proscribed individual freedom.

This was not a million miles away from his assessment of the current state of art. Something of a similarly sarcastic attitude to the usual boring set up of an artist’s talk befuddled the audience, with his decision to instead play (on an out-of-tune Woolworths guitar and microphone) a carefree selection of the first songs he (allegedly) learned to play in his own teenage days. *Ziggy Stardust, Anarchy in the UK, Ceremony* and many many more pissed down. The audience seemed visibly moved. Some understandably sparse questions emerged to be met with relentlessly oblique and reluctant answers.

Using a more conventional slide-show and lecture format, **Craig Richardson’s** presentation reflected on past projects: mainly a large scale work at Chisenhale comprising text and sculpture. This addressed issues such as the culture of political deception and the anti-culture of torture, embodying their mechanisms in a manner perhaps influenced by Baudrillard’s writings: “the object becoming the mode of the subject’s disappearance... preserving the enigma of the object through the enigma of discourse.” The problems of the preservation of meaning in not just the environment, context and location, but within a rapidly

processed, the mark of the author. **Thomas Teatum's** signature was submitted on a price-tag attached to a mini carrier bag. **Giuliana Molinari** tempted you into buying her signature to find out the last line of a grisly story. The price of **Helen Chadwick's** mark was to donate blood. In **Jim Engel's** spot-the-ball competition, the signature card was used to find out if you'd won. Other stimulating works included **Tim Higgins'** parody of a business card and **Leon Griffiths'** reply envelope with postage stamp attached.

Unfortunately the album's wordy text and presumptive declarations was fundamentally what let this project down. The claim that *Outpost* would restructure the complex established relationship between the gallery, the author and the audience by removing it from the "draconian curatorial policies of the major exhibiting institutions" is inconsistent to a project heavily dictated by these policies. For instance, most of the artworks were dispensed in the conservative Scottish

National Galleries (a major compromise for a project attempting to reach beyond the gallery system). To propose that you become your own 'curator' further contradicts the project's claims. Rebellion against the hallowed architecture of white-walled galleries that withhold free access is substituted by a domestic coffee-table gallery using the white pages of the collector's album.

The creation of a more democratic art system should not pander to the tastes of those already content with the traditional gallery system. It can be said that it enforces, rather than subverts the system, and that it confirms the value of the signature for purely commercial reasons. There is nothing opportunist about doing this, but to then claim that *Outpost* is "an urban intervention" that places art outwith the concept of the original in art is contradictory.

In the album, FAT artists **Clive Sall** and **Kevin Rhowbotham** pronounce that art should be considered in its social and

cultural context rather than as the object of art itself, that form and content should be contextualised rather than detected in the isolated object. However, in whatever context the audience receives these business cards, they are still encouraged to become connoisseurs by assembling an exhibition that will ultimately return the art to its traditional subject-object category. Why not invite the audience to create their own contexts and do what they like with the art whether it be to put them in their filofax, on their fridge or down the toilet?

Other FAT ventures include an urban exhibition using Adsite bus shelters around London and plans to create *Outpost* projects in other cities and at 1994's Edinburgh Festival.

Julie Boyne

changing political climate, is taken up by *A Third Party Dictates The Terms*, the Transmission installation. Richardson had spoken of his decision to remove a previous work—a billboard in an unmanned railway station which read "slowly all around you will pass away"—after the onset of the Gulf war, which he felt had drastically altered its meaning. In this respect the Transmission work was an attempt to anticipate—and temporarily preserve the impact of—the effect of the rapidity of events and incorporate them.

The work consisted of a yellow wall, part of which read, "The Euphoria of Destruction," together with a monitor on a high shelf which relayed news footage broadcast the previous night. This had been selected from Channel 4 because of their reliance on actual footage of events, rather than the absurdities of more entertainment-orientated programmes such as *News at Ten*.

Best viewed alone in an empty gallery, the work seemed to have created a corner for itself (*a la* Beuys) where something obsessive and anxious lurked. Although there was a strong sense of vigilance in the work, inasmuch as it focused on the news media, it still seemed to me too dependent on their reading of events, their ownership, use and control.

Edwin David's work was in effect three installations. *The Defence of Utopia*, in the largest space, divided the walls into black and grey quarters: two images, Le Corbusier's model of an ideal city and an

architectural plan of Transmission, faced each other, as did two clocks slightly out of synchronisation. Other elements included a little image of a Soviet Realist sculpture, two tables bearing science fiction novels and folders of selected utopian theorists and a raised dais with an ionizer.

At Dawn the Palace Will Be Ours, comprised a video of an Eisenstein film superimposed by a black square. Nearby lay a box of blank cartridges and a scale model of the Transmission space; an image of a densely packed crowd scene and a text with the work's title were fixed to the crumbling cellar walls. *De-briefing* consisted of empty chairs arranged as if for a lecture, a small image of *Liberty Leading the People* and a pair of crutches (which feature in Delacroix's painting).

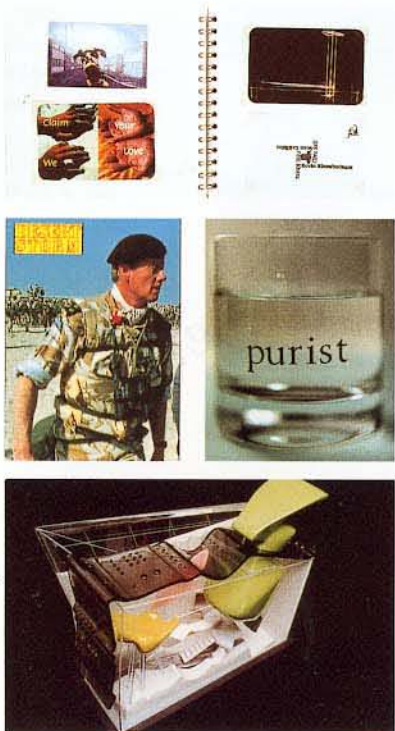
David regarded the exhibition as the second part of his MA show, the first part of which was a utopian museum. This work was intended as a utopian reading room. Generally speaking, he is interested in constructing an arena in which political fantasy can be enacted "without the Marxist heroics of political art." This has drawn him into games of anticipating the visions of what a post-revolutionary art was in the minds of those artists and theorists working in the period when the final ebbing of hopes of European revolution—on the classical model—gave way. A period where we also saw the beginnings of a problematic relation to theory. *The Defence of Utopia* dreams of language as enforcer of structure in the

fantasy zone of absolute synthetic space; space circumscribing an absence, speculating a condition. Quotations and emblems of utopia, in many forms, encourage us to dream of a space as yet unclaimed, a fictionalised territory outside the rule systems governing everyday transactions.

There is, however, the possibility that in relegating politics to the museum, David's work inadvertently draws together post-modern and neo-conservative discourse (not unlike Fukuyama whom he cited), making art somewhat anodyne convey a sense that there is no need for social transformation because we can all make our own meanings. It is tempting to level similar criticisms at Richardson and Sinclair. One also wonders what the real function of such discussions (without debate) amongst such a selection of the artistic community purports to undertake. Was there any sense of achievement, community, collective purpose? Just as we are asked by the language of the artworks to exercise a certain mental rigour in our appreciation, we are also entitled to the artworks themselves being subjected to rigorous criticism, but I witnessed very little of this.

Billy Clark

Taking part in *Outpost* were Elizabeth Adamson, Michael Arbuckle, John Barry, Maria Beddoes, John Bell, Dave Beech, Colin Birkhead, Louise Birtles, John Bodley-Scott, Anja Brinkman, Lisa Brown, Jon Buck, Dina Burnstock, Rebekah Cameron, John Carson, Daniela Cicatiello, Helen Chadwick, Janie Coath, Connie Cooke, Geoffrey Cox, Tessa Cox, Gordon Curtis, Emma Davis, Richard Delingpole, Jeremy Deller, Tim Diggins, Richard Easson, Jim Engel, Fat, Judith Findlay, Randi Fossan, David Fryer, Andy Genovese, Lucy Grant, Sean Griffiths, John Hardwick, Jo Hagan, Terry Haggerty, Anna Hart, Antony Hogan, Dean Hollowood, Simon Honey, Jane Houghton, Mark Hutchinson, Inter Alia, Ian Irving, John Isaacs, Ben Joiner, Andrea Joynson, Ju Row San, Connor Kelly, Paul Khera, Leigh Lenaghan, Daniel Letts, Murray Levinson, Man J. two, Chad McCail, Andy MacFee, Christine Marshall, Miriam McClay, Edmond McGarry, Ken Meehan, Mus Mehmet, Andi Mindel, Giuliana Molinari, Beate Müller, Bee Murphy, Alison Musgrave, Ruth Mylius, Lucy Newnam, Philip Nichols, Titus Nolte, Fola Odetoyinbo, Iris Oelschläger, Michael Ogus, Owen Oppenheimer, Alan Outram, Stan O., Jaqueline Pennell, Alexandra Powers, Josh Pullman, Yael Reisner, Kevin Rhowbotham, Paul Rooney, Mark V. Rossi, Katerina Ruedi, Andrew Howard Rutt, Clive Sall, David Sall, Andi Scott, Madeleine Shearman, Elisabeth Scheder-Bieschin, Chita Schuy, Foto Sifichi, Phil Smedley, Johnny Spencer, Phaythe Stifel, Johnathon Ormondy Taggart, Thomas Teatum, Jess Wallace, Geoff Ward, Lois Ward, Ester Waterfield, Michael Whiteley, Claire Wright, Tim Wright and Jörg-Rainer Zimmerman



Right FAT Collective
Below Ross Sinclair *We Don't Love You Any More*
Far right
A Third Party Dictates The Terms Craig Richardson
At Dawn The Palace Will Be Ours Edwin David
photos by Simon Starling

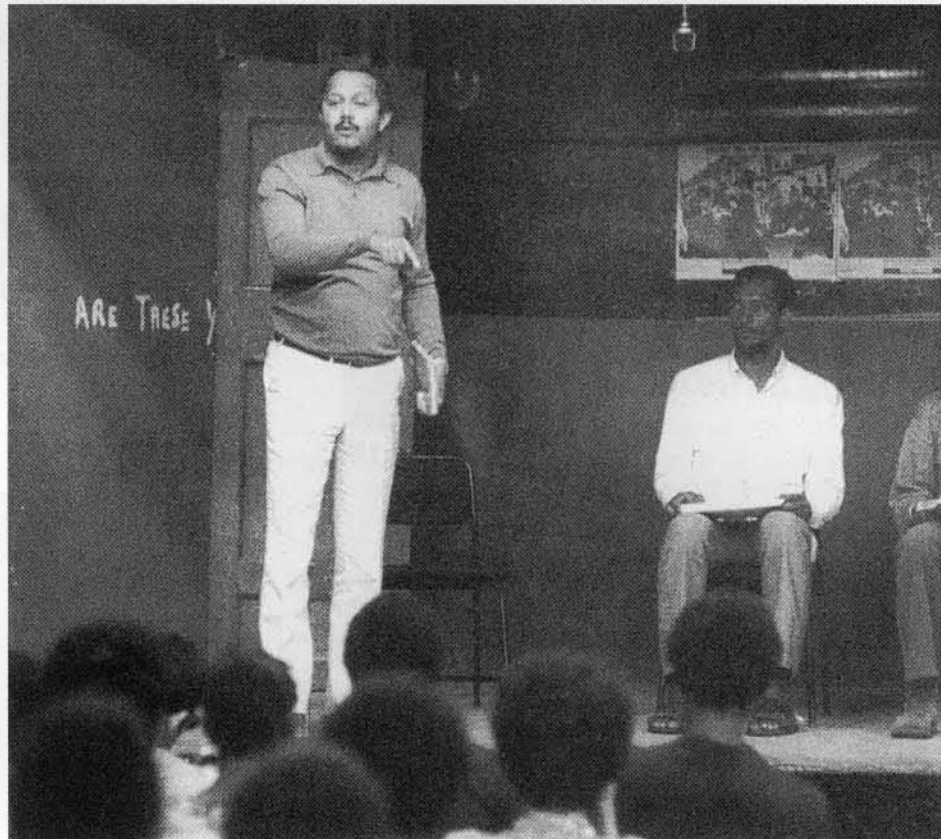


*“it begins with culture
and it ends with
culture”* Cabral

John LaRose

John La Rose (standing),
at rally prior to the
famous Mangrove Nine trial
in 1970.

Poets who read were:
Edward Kamau Brathwaite,
T. Bone Wilson and
Marc Matthews (seated right)
photo © Vanessa Stamford



James Kelman:

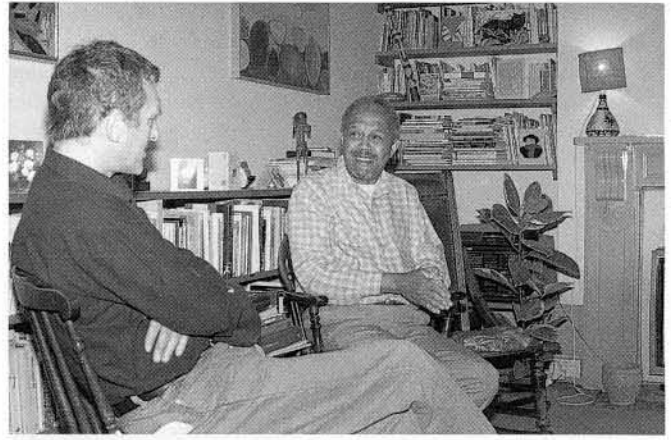
One crucial thing about the Caribbean Artists Movement was the stress it laid on creating an individual aesthetic, to have criticism and appreciation coming from your own culture and your own community.

John La Rose: Well, first about publishing, which is an important element in the autonomy of culture. Prior to our work, people were published abroad by the English publishers. We ought to be able to publish our own material if it's important to our own culture. I thought of it in Trinidad, we had no money but I thought of it; there were all these people publishing small books and pamphlets, literature, poetry, short stories and so on, what people in the Caribbean called self publishing—samizdat; there's still a lot of that. For me, with the experience of CAM, there are two major experiences in my own political life, in the Caribbean and also in Venezuela, where I was in the late 1950s; there I was seeing how artists and writers could do things for themselves and how essential that was. At the time in South America and Central America, there were two main publishing centres, one in Mexico City and the other in Buenos Aires. So if you were a Spanish-American writer you had to be either published in Mexico or Argentina. Having seen all this, my idea was we should really get into publishing ourselves. But I couldn't quite do it at first because we didn't have the money.

This was in England? | I came here in 1961. I was working as a brickie's labourer; we were building the headquarters of BP and I fell off a platform, almost broke my back, I was lucky I didn't. Eventually I got a bit of money in an out-of-court settlement, around £500, and I began publishing. We formed New Beacon in 1966.

There's a related thing I've found exciting about New Beacon, the idea of the community—you have the publisher, the writers, the sympathetic printer, the shop to sell the work, your own customers and so on, almost a complete self-sufficiency. | My going into book publishing was not by chance but the question of book selling was, partly because here in London there was no place I could buy any of the books I wanted to read. So I decided at some stage that we would do the international book service. People came here all the time, downstairs in this house. The book selling was partly encouraged by CAM [from 1966] because now there were new writers being published and some of our CAM sessions involved discussing new work. Some of these sessions might have been private but it was always a free autonomous thing, interacting with ideas and personalities. People should not suppress what they think for this or that reason. Encouraging free and open discussion was a very important part of what we were doing. In a certain sense you're making yourself vulnerable by discussing all you think personally, your own feelings... It's important for the artist. It allowed for the 'free development of free individuals'—a famous Marx phrase. That's what was happening within CAM.

Who else was involved at that time? | It was really a coming together of three people devoted to literature and Caribbean culture and society: Eddie Kamau Brathwaite, Andrew Salkey and myself. There was a lot of experience flowing into CAM and it was very significant because of the fact that this was a movement that sought to deal with the artist as a totally vulnerable person engaged with other artists—as people involved in politics and so on. Cabral says, "It begins with culture and it ends with culture," and we did that in the sense



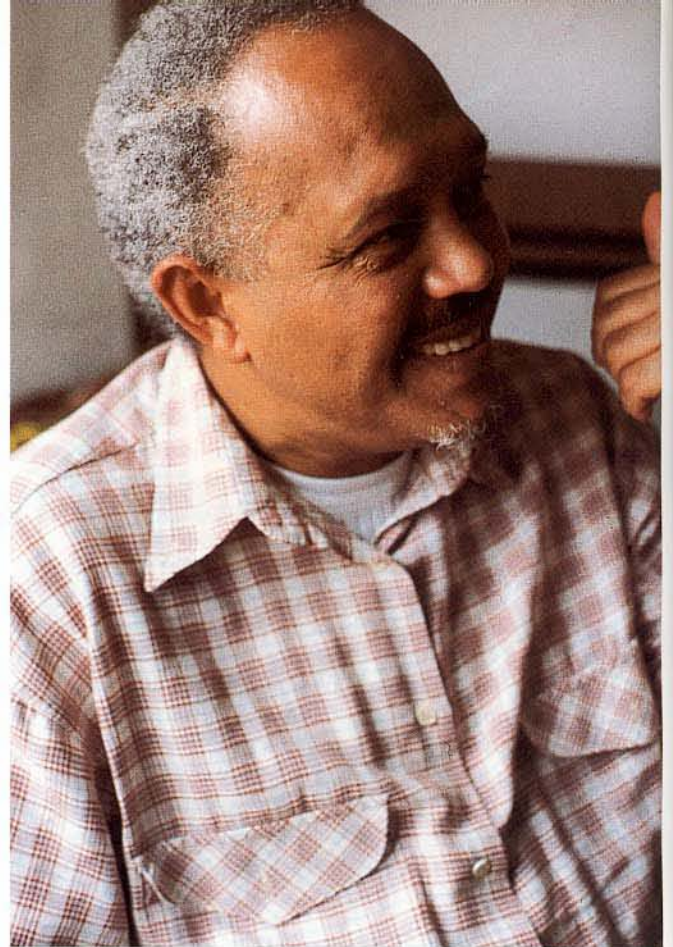
James Kelman and John La Rose photo Leslie Shearer

The original of this interview with John La Rose lasted approximately two-and-a-half hours and will be published as a booklet in its own right. This transcript is vastly reduced and drastically edited, so much so that it's better to call it 'a version'. Obviously the magazine did it with John La Rose's permission. It is by way of a follow up to the review of Anne Walmsley's seminal work, **THE CARIBBEAN ARTISTS MOVEMENT 1966–1972** (New Beacon, 76 Stroud Green Road, London N4 3EN), printed in issue 15 of Variant. CAM is arguably the most vital cultural formation that has existed in this country. Its influence on younger generations of black activists and artists continues, 20 years after its demise.

We have tried to indicate the historical background to CAM,

giving some idea of the roots of its extraordinary organisational capacity. This is an interview with one man and it must not obscure the central roles of other writers and artists. As will become apparent, if there is a theoretical position then its concerns are the direct opposite of 'leadership' or 'vanguard' notions. CAM could not have existed without its primary assumption of the potential of ordinary people. CAM was a pluralist organisation with some contrasting and related views on life, on writing and on art and culture. For John La Rose, ideologies that imply the concept of the 'lumpen proletariat' are dismissed as quickly as that other intellectual absurdity, that a separation exists between politics and art (or culture).

John La Rose 1993
 photo Leslie Shearer
 Aubrey Williams *Visual Idea* 1963
 Winston Branch *Liberty was my Friend* 1970



that ‘a cultural subject’ up for discussion took in everything—literature, politics, music... everything in society. Coming from the Caribbean you had a really great experience of diverse societies. In Trinidad we have the Chinese, the French Creoles, Spaniards, English, Africans—I grew up seeing Syrians selling cloth. I went to school with them all—I’m very familiar with Indian society, I have a feeling of growing up with it. An Irish priest taught me Greek. I hadn’t known white people attacking other white people, but here was this man attacking the English for the Black and Tans. I didn’t know that white people could talk about other white people like that; the idea was it was only black people who did it, you know, “black and chicken can’t do nothing,”—those kind of self deprecatory, self-contemptuous sayings which have been imposed on society. The revolutionary movement and the cultural movement weakens all these things; every time it moves forward it shows that it’s not true, we *can* do these things, we can deal with the British. 1903 was a situation where we almost had power in Trinidad. The place where the Government had its seat—the Red House—was burned down in the riots. There’s a kaiso [calypso] about it.

Publishing was a way of reclaiming history as well. | That was very much of what we were doing, very actively as a political movement involved in popular culture which in Trinidad, in the kaisos in particular, makes reference to all these events in our society. CAM began four years after the independence of Jamaica and Trinidad. The modern Caribbean has to be seen in terms of the struggle between 1935 and 1938. In our study groups we had gone into all the details of ‘Labour in the West Indies’ written by Arthur Lewis, who won the Nobel Prize; we knew of our own battles in the ‘40s and it was only ten years after that we were involved in a massive struggle ourselves. But going through the thing we saw all the details of those struggles of the unemployed and the workers. We’d work out theoretically that these things begin with the unemployed who are in direct

confrontation with the State. And subsequently the organised workers get involved in those struggles: it's not the other way around. And because of that theoretical position I could understand things here in relation to black unemployed and the State, and the white working class and the black working class here in Britain, where people regarded unemployed people as the 'lumpen proletariat.' In fact they are not that, whatever Marx may have said, they are not that. They are a very active source of struggle and change in all societies; and we saw it in France and we saw it in the Caribbean, later in the big revolts in Martinique which started off with a white guy killing a black worker or something like that—that's how it starts—it was a tinderbox of racial resentment, of unemployment and so on, like in Ireland. When you live in a colony like we lived, you have a high percentage of permanent unemployment, and I learned a lot about that. There was a common experience to CAM members, we were from colonial territories of Britain, fighting against British colonial domination, what we in Trinidad had called 'battleship democracy.' We were all anti-assimilation; none of us were starry-eyed, I knew a lot about British history, of Churchill and his corruption and all his family in the Cabinet, things of that sort. There was nothing here to impress me. I was very detached, but genuinely wanted to understand the nature of this colonial experience and how it affected us and our societies, culturally, politically, socially; in all kinds of ways—and what that interaction means. And we were doing all that here, exploring all the time, within CAM, exploring it in terms of the writers and their writing, the artists and their art.

Moving into the post-CAM period, into the struggles of the 1970s; looking from the outside there seems to have been more of a concentration on political activism per se. Did art and culture remain important? | It always was here in London, for example at the West Indian Student Centre where we talked about the Black Education Movement and so on. It stimulated the students. A dance group produced a piece based on Okot p'Bitek called 'Song of Lawino'—in a small room with no stage. They followed it up with articles which we discussed: questions such as "where can you make theatre?" or "how can you make it?"—the answers to which are *anywhere* and *any way*. That influence would then be taken out into whatever else people were doing. Different organisations organised as part of what they had taken from the CAM experience, because CAM was interested in both doing productions and discussing issues. These youngsters are now into all kinds of things. An explosion of black creativity took place—interestingly, in the plays and the poetry. With CAM the public performance began with Kamau Brathwaite's 'Rights of Passage;' this influenced a whole lot of that generation.

The performance has been so important in poetry, as in other countries. When there is struggle performance becomes an exchange, taking part in an experience within your own culture. All these things to say, this is our culture, our language—you don't have to turn away in embarrassment because you've met someone from your own background, whereas part of the colonial experience—as it's also been in Scotland—is that you're taught to be ashamed of your own culture. | Our experience showed politics, art and culture were one holistic thing; I found it very difficult to understand the nature of artists in British society who somehow kept themselves away from these things.

They're trained to separate them. | They become entertainers. The first thing people said at a play was that "it was a success" or "it was interesting." These were critical people, but working for

newspapers and so on. The language they used was not an effective tool of communication, for interchange with the artist and the work. They weren't prepared to commit themselves to an independent opinion. I would freely make a comment about how I saw a play and try to engage them about their feelings on it, how they responded to it, intuitively. I thought those things were important, not simply the intellectual presentation of it, the intellectual understanding. You couldn't move your society with bland expressions, you had to really engage in a serious interchange between both individuals and social groupings. Within CAM we'd gone to the ultimate to do that.

Even within the Left here, there is disinformation on art works, that their function is basically decorative or whatever. Art generally is devalued; it's still predicated on the fact that you can get a 'political painting' here and a 'still life' there. Related issues arose at CAM among the visual artists, to do with prescription, "what should I paint in my paintings to show my commitment?" | That's a hangover from the question of the role of the artist in society, from 'art for art's sake' to 'Social Realism.' At CAM we were all interested in the visual arts, some of us were practitioners; we were vitally concerned about it, unlike the other arts—plays and poetry etc.; the articulation of ideas and theories about art was very limited, I discovered that we hadn't done for the visual arts what we had done elsewhere. That kind of discussion did go on but not at the same intensity in the public events, it took place privately and doesn't figure in the CAM documentation.

That was actually the bottom line though, primarily as a way artists could talk together. There was a good statement you made about when the time for CAM was at an end, that we shouldn't worry about it, not "mistake the embers for the fire" etc, there's something else we will develop—I'm paraphrasing. | Politics is so much part of the experience of life, it means that with the intimate experience of politics you're also experiencing life in a particular way. People bring to politics what they are. They can't bring anything else. Whatever way you've developed, you bring that to politics. There's nothing idealistic about politics. That phrase, "come the revolution," is a nonsense. My argument is the very opposite: it is the very process by which we live that makes this a continuing, constant process. There's no end or beginning in a revolutionary process. Here in Britain in 1981—the 'Brixton riots,' The Rising—the people who took on the police weren't active political people, they were ordinary people whose sense of Britain was a sense of tremendous police action in the area, plus all kinds of social oppressions, from school to unemployment and so on. They took on the police in a very military way, attack then retreat, then simply disappear; and that's how the unemployed behaved in the Caribbean in the '30s. Creativity does not simply mean being a writer or a musician, it means social creativity as well, which involves all these people whom other people regard as the 'ordinary zero' in society. It was these black youngsters who said, "self defence is no offence" or "come what may we're here to stay," it was their slogans. Their parents weren't saying that. These youngsters faced up to the police in Brixton and everywhere in London, the police were framing them up all over the place. Those slogans affected people in France, they began to say, "J'y suis, j'y reste"—*I am here and I remain here*. This is ordinary creativity. It was very much part of what we understood a popular movement to be. It teaches people how to organise themselves so they become part of their own independent autonomous organisation, taking on these matters.

With thanks to Leslie Shearer and Billy Clark

Currently the phrase 'Ambient Music' is being used in the music media like it is some new religion or be-all-and-end-all of contemporary musical genres. If you care to search around the 'experimental' spectrum you will be surprised (although you shouldn't) to see that this kind of 'mood-music' has gradually been gathering momentum for at least the last 7 years with outfits like The Anti Group and their blend of ambisonics and occult semantics; Lustmord, one of the few who can actually speak with authority on body/mind altering sound frequencies; Nocturnal Emissions and their use of sounds from the natural world; Zoviet France, and their innovative use of 'samples' (before samplers) and home made instruments, to more recent creators of haunting soundscapes—Lull, Techno Animal, Multicide, Psychic Warriors. Ov Gaia are just a few of an endless list. Unfortunately the majority of the aforementioned remain ignored, mainly due to the fact that they are classed as 'industrial' music (sic).

Deep in the heart of Texas resides the excellent *ND Magazine*, which has relentlessly documented these fields of music for a substantial number of years. Its editors have taken the very brave step of starting their own label at a time when distribution companies fold with alarming regularity and production costs escalate. The three releases below are prime examples of the sermon above—musicians who have been creating for many years and are now thankfully getting the recognition they deserve.



John Watermann / Calcutta Gas Chamber

Australian **John Watermann** (with over twenty releases under his belt) releases *Calcutta Gas Chamber* (NDCD 03), a disturbing treatise with allegations of population control in India by the use of a gas chamber (backed by some provocative liner notes). This CD deviates from his usual realm of tape loop and voice cut-up methods, and instead reaches out to you with huge slabs of terrifying white noise on various audible frequencies. He combines this with a bizarre use of natural sounds, a prime example here being the flapping of a pigeon's wings, altered so much from the source that if listened to on headphones leaves you feeling uneasy as if being watched by some unseen visitor. This is true of the entire work, with its moments of relative calm permeated with whispered voices and sounds reminiscent of someone being strapped into some form of surgical apparatus. Taking each individual track to task is not really possible as this should be listened to as a complete composition, dedicating specific time to appreciate fully the complexity of the sounds and treatments. Watermann with his undefined 'gas' breathing sounds, machine parts and barely audible whispers has achieved the creation of a genuine ambience.



Puerto Rico based **PBK**—who has been extremely active in the experimental scene since 1986—presents *Macrophage / The Toil and The Reap* (NDCD 01), two album length works on one CD. *Macrophage*, the more recent and more intense of the two, is an anger filled room of jarring sound loop upon jarring sound loop, held together by walls of charged electrical dissonance. A discomposing soundscape of virulent noise, the repetitive aspect of which gives it an almost hypnotic quality that draws you deeper in, urging you to increase the volume. Basic elements of scratching are used to a surprising effect when combined with the sheer volume of sounds that your ear is expected to cope with. A relentless hum of machinery and distant threatening laughter is brought to a sudden end with the start of the second instalment, *The Toil*. This is altogether more calming and easy on the ears. Sustained vocal chants float over a sea of orchestral keyboards and gentle harmonics.

On a purely aesthetic level, listening to **Vidna Obmana** and *Ending Mirage* (NDCD 02) returns you to a relaxed state and is every bit the ambient recording that is craved for by many. Vidna Obmana are part of a growing number of musicians currently exploring the aspects of sound as tools for use in a ritual context. This work is the final part in a trilogy of recordings that has seen them explore their approach to their own



therapy

Robert M King listens to recent work by some seminal ambient groups

Soundscape



compositions. *Ending Mirage* does require a large amount of concentration as it has been recorded at a fairly low level (intentionally) and really benefits from the simultaneous use of headphones and speakers. It is an intensely moving work, the wash of echoed keyboards, sustained voice loops and electronic and acoustic treatments have an almost ethereal quality tinged with a trace of sadness. *Ending Mirage* is telling a story but it is for you to put the words on the paper. There is no shortage of points of inspiration, a serene but siren-like voice lulls your mind and body into a restful state and you will be surprised to find that you can indeed focus on internal imagery. Haunting, compelling and highly recommended. Why pay over the odds for obsolete and occluded 'self help' and 'awareness' cassettes and CDs from companies whose motivation is profit when you can have recordings like this?

TUU with *One Thousand Years* (SDV 027 CD) have a more organic approach to their material. It is a unique fusion of instruments and sources from around the world together with an underlying mesh of synthesizers and samplers. The opening peaceful tones of the Pan pipes and Chinese bamboo flutes offer up an air of mysticism which becomes ever more apparent as the music floats along. Fragile beats and rhythms on the South Indian Ghatam and Brazilian clay pot drums provide a faint heartbeat-like pulse, similar in many ways to the Kodo drummers of Japan (Columbia) and the east/west outfit Trisan (Realworld), both essential listening for anyone even vaguely interested in this area of music. TUU's ability to blend such a variety of musical styles and instrumentation is quite remarkable: more often than not when using electronic and 'natural' instruments there is a tendency for the modern to dominate the traditional, but not so with TUU, whose skill makes you forget that they are actually using synthesizers. Mantra chanting monks weave in and out of the intricate melodies, ushered on by the delicate tones of Japanese meditation gongs, traditionally used to invoke benevolent spirits. As with Vidna Obmana, the music of TUU is an excellent focal point for meditation and relaxation. Indeed whilst speaking to them recently they told me that the cassette version of this release is selling extremely well via alternative and New Age bookstores, for around half the price of the self help tapes mentioned previously.

• ND Magazine can be contacted at PO Box 4144, Austin, Texas 78765 USA
ND releases are distributed in the UK by Mute Records—contact Mute for a catalogue by writing to them at:
Mute Records,
429 Harrow Road, London W10 4RE

**William Burroughs with
The Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy
Spare Ass Annie and Other Tales**
4th and Broadway BRCD 600/518 352 2

Burroughs' cultural positioning—in what must be his final years—by his minder James Grauerholz continues apace. Last week, grunge with Nirvana's Kurt Cobain's guitar wailings over *The Priest They Called Him*—this week, hip-hop with the **Disposable Heroes**.

New readings of largely old routines from the rusty-voiced son-of-a-bitch himself. Like the earlier Hal Willner production *Dead City Radio* (WSB with Sonic Youth, John Cale, Donald Fagen and the National Broadcasting Orchestra), Burroughs seems to have recorded his voice at home, handed the tapes over and had no further input, leaving his musical 'collaborators' to do as they please.

On the whole it works: Burroughs' lucid dream-speak and disturbing imagery is embellished by lazily-paced hip-hop; a variety of sound effects, samples and backing vocals; and more of the National Broadcasting Orchestra. A few tracks work particularly well. The *Doctor Benway* routine—cocaine-fuelled surgeon operating with a toilet plunger—is well-served with a squelchily sleazy backing; *One God Universe* has a sublime gospel feel; and the stark realism of *The Junky's Christmas* (a moving 16-minute tour de force rooted, of course, in Burroughs' own experience) has a definite filmic quality, with the Heroes' suspicious street-walking music alternating with brass bands playing Christmas carols. Burroughs purists may pronounce otherwise, but his material really comes alive in this context.

Phil England



Spell
Seasons in the Sun
Mute Records CD Stumm 126

Spell is Boyd Rice and Rose McDowell and their debut album *Seasons In The Sun* has got to be one of the most bizarre and quirky I've heard in a long time. Boyd Rice has been making some pretty interesting noises for over a decade under his own name and as NON, but these tended to be hypnotically intense and overpowering moments of sonic overload. I first encountered Rose McDowell in a small but packed nightclub in Glasgow back in 1982, and it was evident even then that she would go far. First came Strawberry Switchblade, then her involvement with people like Death In June and Coil in addition to her own solo work.

Seasons explores their fascination with the darker side of the '60s and a generation obsessed with love and death. Boyd's ominous voice is perfectly matched by Rose's bewitching pop tones. They have chosen to cover a few classics—*Seasons in the Sun*, *Terry*, *Big Red Balloon*—together with a host of rarely heard gems and an evocative rendition of the theme from *Rosemary's Baby*. Musically they have managed to capture the sentiments of the original recordings with the minimum of instrumentation, which creates a sparse, echoing 36 minutes and 41 seconds of nostalgia.

RMK



Sainkho Namtchylak

with Kang Tae Hwan

Live

FIN CD 9301

Letters

Leo CDLR198

Out of Tuva

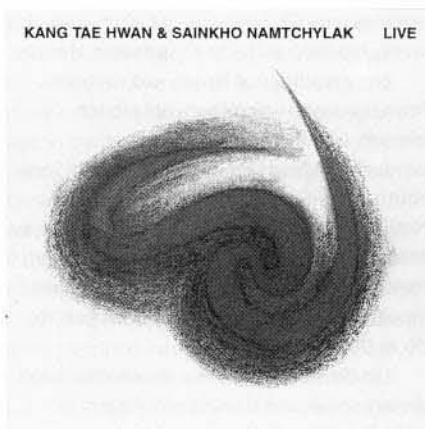
Crammed Crow 6

Three recordings featuring the unusual voice of **Sainkho Namtchylak**, the Tuvan-born singer whose emergence from the collapsing CIS has led to a meteoric rise in the world of new music. On *Live* she is joined by the South Korean saxophonist **Kang Tae Hwan**, whose percussive, driving style on the first of three duo improvisations is complemented by Sainkho's guttural clucks and mutters—a responsive and restrained performance. After a solo spot each, the pair go overboard in a wild finale, Sainkho shrieking violently, barking above Kang's high pitch whining. Resolutely piercing, this piece positively boils with energy and noise.

Letters is a more contemplative work, which tells of the singer's embarrassments in the West: not knowing the work of this or that musician, feeling ill-at-ease, ill-educated, inadequate. Musically, she stands her ground in the company of Sten Sandell, Joëlle Léandre and Mats Gustafsson, performing effortless duos of a singular richness. More problematic for me are the group pieces with Kieloor Entartet, altogether too busy and fussy an ensemble, stuck in a jazzy Euro-rut.

Out of Tuva is a historical tour through Sainkho's recent past, ranging from pop songs recorded in Siberia in the late eighties to recent 'world music' collaborations with Hector Zazou. These pieces are charming in direct proportion to their age. *Kolkhozchu Man*, with its then state-of-the-art Moscow folk orchestra—oompah rhythms on xylophone and accordion—is a pricelessly quaint number. Zazou's ZNR-ish production on *Bai-Laa Tanegam* is elegant enough, but the opening track on the CD, *Tanola Nomads*, with its plodding rock drumbeat and flashes of electric guitar, is a hugely vulgar exercise in which the banal and the exotic are compressed into a single, groan-provoking dance-floor failure.

Ed Baxter



Unknown Public

Issue 3

Pianoforte UPCD03, CD/MC

Unknown Public is part of an unspoken alliance—including BBC Radio 3's new music department ('Mixing It,' 'Midnight Oil' and 'Music In Our Time') and *The Wire* magazine among others—chipping away at the barriers between high culture and low culture, the popular and the avant-garde. Here establishment, renegade and oppositional cultures rub shoulders in a juxtaposition of values which is not always comfortable.

Issue 3 of the self-styled 'creative music quarterly' is an *Exploding Piano* issue that approaches the piano from a refreshing variety of non-traditional angles. There's the exciting rhythmic precision of **Graham Fitkin's** minimalist rollercoaster *Loud* for six pianos; **Alex Maguire's** freewheeling improvisation and stylistic melange; the ethereal (Harold Budd-like), floating quality of **Stephen Montague's** processed piano and tape; **Stanislaw Hansel's** wonderfully absurd *Psychic Music*, **Michael Nyman's** romanticism; and the horror movie-suspense of **Benoit Delbecq's** improvisation on prepared piano. A nice contrast to these longer works is provided by the compressed time of a feature called *Scratchpad*: a compilation of seven works each under a minute in length.

A pluralist project such as this is bound to be contentious. If *Unknown Public* leans too heavily towards established British composers, there's no denying it's an informative and entertaining project worthy of support.

PE

• Editorial and subscription details from:
Unknown Public, PO Box 354,
Reading RG2 7JB

African Head Charge

In Pursuit of Shashamans Land

On-U Sound LP 65/C/CD 25

Dub Syndicate

Echomania

On-U Sound LP 64/C/CD 24

Like so many On-U-Sound 'groups,' the names **African Head Charge** and **Dub Syndicate** are rather umbrella monickers for the collective hired hands and floating free-agents of the ever-expanding, ever-anonymous On-U posse/tribe/family.

African Head Charge was always one of the more left-field of Adrian Sherwood's projects connected by the common thread of the propulsive, intricate hypnotism of Bonjo Iyabinghi's percussion. *In Pursuit of Shashamans Land*, like its (also excellent) predecessor, *Songs of Praise*, sees AHC in a less 'out,' more focused phase. The dub-abstractions of *Environmental Studies* and *Drastic Season* have been replaced by a more up-front spiritual and tribal feel which has been crafted almost into song-format. The chants, vocal fragments and fragile folk/documentary recordings which often take the place of vocal parts, reinforce the earthy, primal quality of this timeless music.

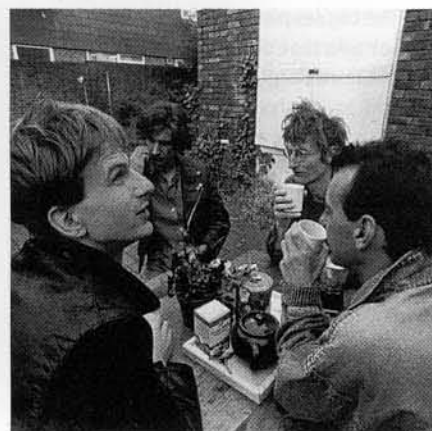
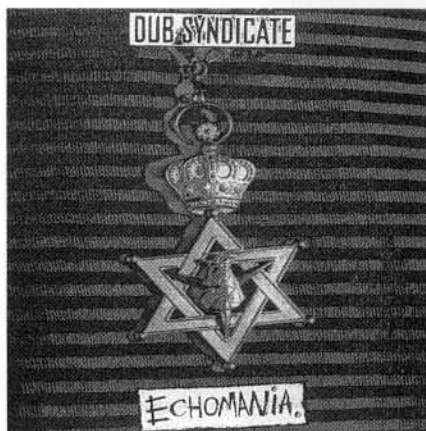
Dub Syndicate are a more mellow affair: their reggae is sweet enough for a broader appeal. *Echomania* marks no radical new direction but is pleasant enough—if a bit too much insistent on the bass drum at times—and has an ample measure of intriguing dub detail in the mixdown. Guest vocalists include Lee 'Scratch' Perry, Akubu and U-Roy. If you have the choice always plump for the CD or cassette versions of these albums as they have sizeable amounts of extra material.

Radical dub fans should also seek out the overloaded extremes of the milestone that is **Mark Stewart + Mafia's** debut *Learning to Cope with Cowardice* (On U-Sound LP 24). In the meantime *In Pursuit* contains some of the best AHC material to date.

PE



African Head Charge with Bonjo Iyabinghi Noah photo Panni Charrington



Teatime for The Work photo Yasmin Panic

The Work

See

Wool 015

The Work comprises Tim Hodgkinson, Mick Hobbs, Bill Gilonis and Rick Wilson, all figures associated with that tendency in European rock music which has sought to extend (rather than demolish) song form—in groups such as Hobbs' post-Barrett (Syd, not Dick) **Officer!**, Gilonis' "subterranean supergroup" **The Hat Shoes** and (millstone or milestone)

Henry Cow, which Hodgkinson co-founded. After a decade of intermittent activity on the fringes of rock, mostly working on the continent, they've produced their most urgent recording for some time. It's a pleasant surprise after their recent London gig, which, in the pit of Camden's *Underworld*, was something of a Night of the Long Grey Overcoats—to my flu-frenzied brain a distillation of numberless post-punk gigs of yore, with a *Who's Who* audience of ageing thrill-seekers. *See* features some

sparkling, spare, dance numbers, with upfront, but not always convincing, confrontational vocals expressive of a belief in rock music's ability to change minds. There are some precisely controlled forays into early Ubu type din (or, I guess, earlier-Work type din) and, on *Shine*, an electric summoning of the ghost of Harry Partch. It's altogether an intelligent set, at its best achieving a kind of toe-tapping timelessness which more cynical minds might mistake for some weird exercise in nostalgia. EB

Haniwa

Happy People

Sony Japan

Haniwa is the group project of **Senba**, one of Japan's most respected and skilled traditional drummers. But folk music it ain't. His is a strikingly unusual oeuvre, comparable to that of Van Dyke Parks, in terms of its meticulous attention to detail and fascination with surface; to Magma, in terms of its highly controlled displays of virtuoso playing and sheer drive; and, as a historical point of reference, to After Dinner and Wha Ha Ha, stable-mates of an oriental school of speed-reading-rock, similarly concerned with the production of subversive, technically dazzling music.

Happy People is an instantly memorable collection of post-modern, ecstasy-flavoured bubble-gum pop, knowing, witty and rapturous. Charming to the point where it appears to the purely casual listener to be an exercise in kitsch, this is Haniwa's fourth recording in a decade and their most lush yet, deploying the full range of acoustic folk, contemporary electronics and studio-specific instrumentation. A finely honed artlessness characterises the thoroughly addictive pop ballads, with their evidently nonsensical choruses, self-parodying pompous organ arpeggios and humorously self-conscious interruptions.

The big set pieces are imaginary movie soundtracks that distil every larger-than-life gesture from Barry to Bollywood and beyond, in which wild horns bray and banks of violins sweep over Senba's pounding beat to produce what Peter Cheyney would call "a hot number." Senba's skill lies not only in an unparalleled ear for mixing unflatteringly a wide range of instruments into an uncannily seamless blend, but in his ability to write songs of disarming immediacy, at once laden with the overwhelming weight of half-forgotten memories and half-remembered pop motifs, and yet light, sexy, hallucinogenic. The nine musicians who accompany him (he uses up to fifty in live performance) are superb, delivering deadpan this most sophisticated of in-jokes, Japan's best-kept secret.

EB

Vibraslaps

Catherine Jauniaux and Ikue Mori

RecRec ReCDec 52

Death Praxis

Tenko and Ikue Mori

What Next WN 0011

Two recordings for voice and drum machine, each testing the limits of minimal instrumentation and making a virtue of a

necessary lack of tonal colour. *Vibraslaps* pitches Belgian singer **Catherine Jauniaux** against **Ikue Mori**'s often frenetic electronic percussion, her vocals charged with theatricality. Baroque interior monologues give way to animal noises, forays into operatic passion and sly glimpses of Helen Kane as Mori's supremely confident playing moves deftly from cartoonish blips and crashes to the shrieks of the building site. Jauniaux's feverish presence veers from the flamboyantly assertive to the solipsistically obsessive.

On *Death Praxis*, Mori's fellow Japanese **Tenko** provides a harsher voice, sometimes soothing but more often forbidding and portentous. A claustrophobic affair, the songs here are more abstract, even those with a palpable dance rhythm. *Death Praxis* extends the air of menace hinted at in *Vibraslaps*, a mood of which Mori is the charming generator. If one views the ascendancy of the drum machine in terms of the scarcity of domestic space, particularly in cities—its niche in rooms too cramped for a kit—then perhaps it is the instrument which most audibly articulates the aspiration to break out of the confines of the home. Lacking any real *kick*, it must be forced into new modes of expressivity if it is not to be merely switched on and left to play itself, as it is so often in dance pieces. On both these recordings, its palette is extended: often it sounds like the creaking of an old house; the clatter of washing up or of DIY; the hum of appliances; the explosion of vast distant cities on the television. These recordings represent music for broken homes, for breaking up homes—by extension, for a world in which the concept of *home* has become obsolescent. As such, they are peculiarly charged, at once clinically crisp and unnerving.

EB

Otomo Yoshihide

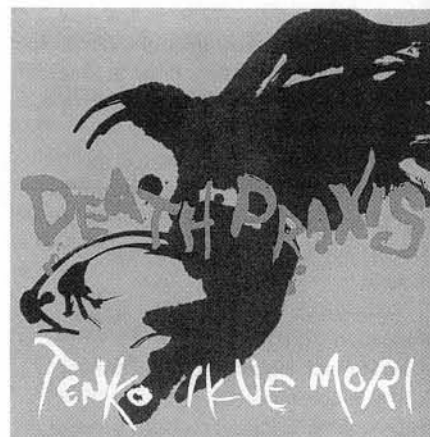
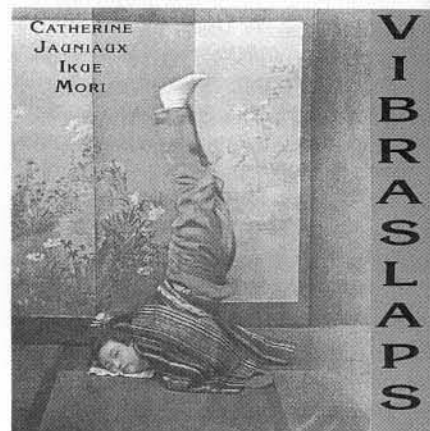
The Night Before The Death of the Sampling Virus

Extreme XCD 024

Yoshihide's *Sampling Virus* is an avowedly non-musical work of sounds (sampled and concrete, featuring the voices of Tenko and Eye, amid much mass-media speech-cum-detritus) 'behaving of their own will.' It's more obviously a highly critical reaction to the ambiguities of the high-tech society of modern Japan than Senba's outing. It's not necessarily likeable: 'one confirmed effect is apparently the prevention of over-happy facial expressions,' Otomo writes in the sleeve notes. Delivered with a sly humour, *Sampling Virus* encourages the listener to utilise the CD player to its fullest extent, even

to destroy the CD. The seventy-seven tracks range from two seconds long to over three minutes, leading even the passive listener into a vertiginously unstable world where unreal meanings run riot. If that world sounds familiar, then perhaps you're getting close to the very dry, hyper-conscious, crash-it-or-trash-it philosophy undermining this most pertinent work—a chaotic antidote to the Orient's creeping otaku fetishists and their nerdish counterparts way out west.

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Towering Inferno

Kaddish

TI CD1

Towering Inferno is Richard Wolfson (guitar, keyboards) and Andy Saunders (guitar, saxophone), here joined by Hungarian singers Marta Sebestyen and Endre Szarosi. Elton Dean, John Marshall, Chris Cutler and Alex Kolkowski have cameo roles, along with the Electra String group and a choir, Choral Cymry Liundain. As one might expect, given the size of the cast, *Kaddish* is a work on an epic scale, three years in the making. A wide ranging piece, it incorporates folk motifs and state-of-the-art electronics in a dynamic suite focused on resistance and, cryptically, on the strength of culture as a source of nourishment and identity. In this sense, it might be useful to differentiate it from the now familiar world-music package of exotic and/or traditional music reconfigured for western ears—for easy-listening from the sagging, straw-spewing armchair of Europe's vacuous psyche. This is more balanced, more ambiguous, its relation to its source material (Hungarian ballads, Nazi soundbites, etc.) provocative and bold. Elements reminiscent of Nico's *The Marble Index* and, by association, the work of Boris Kovacs temper the aggressive industrial rock suite, an unresolved work in which religious content, folksong and noise stand side by side. The opening track, incidentally, is exquisite and the other songs are deftly performed. The instrumental interludes are more awkward. *Modern Times* captures the ferocity of western industrialisation in an unrelenting, futurist soundtrack; but can one really write and execute a string piece called *Dachau* and still hope to speak of artistic success? I wonder. Derek Jarman provides the cover art and there are some curious Super-8 stills which hint at a visual counterpart of this intriguing and ambitious work.

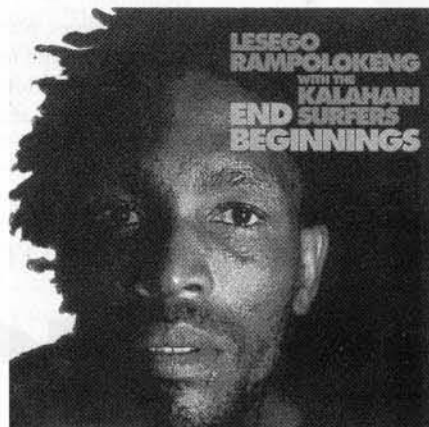
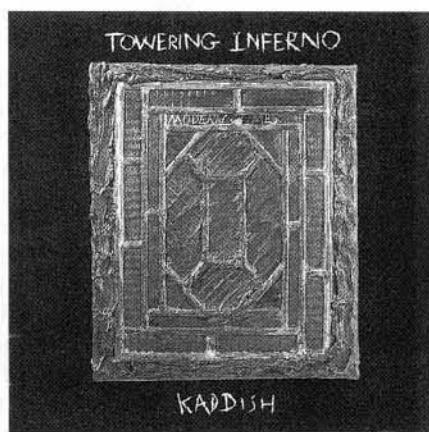
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Nurse With Wound

Soliloquy for Lilith

United Dairies UD 035 CD

Steve Stapleton is a sort of underground genius who has been putting out records on his own label under the name **Nurse With Wound**. His work has spanned dadaist sound collage, ear splitting noise, sinister improvisation and satirical pop music, but generally confounds glib categorisation and short-circuits preconception. His no publicity approach (e.g., distributor World Serpent don't send out promo copies unless they are specifically contacted) ensures an artistic vision unfettered by market place concerns.



Soliloquy for Lilith is a meditative drone record, originally released in 1988 as a triple LP box set, now a digitally remastered double CD. It features a home-made circuit—"all strings stretched across various pick-ups"—interfered with by Steve and his engineer. The tidal, overtone rich, glinting and shimmering music that results matches the metaphor in the sleeve notes: "I shall find a quiet pool in the forest and I shall be alone there often. I shall gaze into the deep, still water and that stillness will be in me."

In an interview in *Option* magazine in 1989, Steve remarked that "Loads of magical sects have actually used it in their rituals. They say, *At last a ritualistic record that's not fluked or mystical natter.*" Indeed, this is singular, sacred and expansive. A regenerative stillness in a hectic world.

PE

• From specialist music stores or mail order from World Serpent, Unit 717, Seager Buildings, Brookmill Road, London SE8 4HL

Lesego Rampolokeng with the Kalahari Surfers

End Beginnings

ReR Megacorp LRSCD1

Lesego Rampolokeng is a black South African poet, author of the volume *Horns for Hondo*, from the trenchant texts of which this record is constructed. Rampolokeng's is a voice worn smooth by the terrors of apartheid, coolly plucking ripe words of dissent from the gasoline-laden air of the townships and tossing them with languid menace at an audience, any audience. A witness to and victim of the years of state repression and the encroachment of an amnesic, insidious cant in the 'new' South Africa, his poems lucidly speak of a pessimistic unease which recognises the nature of the present's political crises. Consequently, his vision is marked by an all-pervading violence, formally suggested in a poetry which (written in English) forces words to contort in an effort to articulate the bruised psyche of the activist. It's not pretty, and the musical screen onto which the verse is projected eschews the usual trappings of the entertainment industry.

What *End Beginnings* offers is rather a documentary, a topical testament which seeks to pinpoint the feeling essential to a particular time and place. The title track, bringing to my mind at least a line of another protest-singer, Phil Ochs—"The cowards will pretend that it's getting near the end when it's beginning" (*Santo Domingo*)—is an apocalyptic cut-up, in which "black tits and bums of a nation of strippers and exhibitionists made Jesus die of masturbation." Rampolokeng hints at the power of his art in the witty *Rapmaster*, but overall, despite the explosive imagery he deploys, there's a feeling of walking on a knife-edge with his frail arsenal ranged against the monumental machinery of mass-media, church, state and the institutionalisation of unbridled inhumanity.

This is a work marked by urgency, but also by pain and weariness, almost one might suggest, pace Mark Twain, by the lack of self-respect that accompanies true sanity. The arrangements by Warrick Sony, only begetter of **The Kalahari Surfers**, are what we've come to expect from this singularly sharp-minded musician, no mean songwriter in his own right, here content to take a back-seat so as to focus on the flames of Rampolokeng's words—"warm like lice on the pubis in love time/singing cold bones/in the rain of hope."

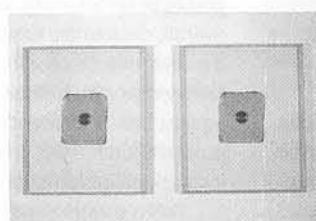
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The concept of the avant-garde is as much an area of contention today as it has been since its initial cultural formulation by Saint-Simon in 1825.¹ Attempting to define it is also a traditional folly. That it is repeatedly attempted has much to do with its various meanings in the diverse contexts and subject positions available in the art world. The artist rarely uses it as a term of self-description; there exists a certain etiquette, involving modesty, that makes it a slightly embarrassing label. For the critic to describe something as avant-garde usually indicates a certain mystification in the face of the object, and as such the term legitimates incomprehension. For the gallery owner, the avant-garde indicates a relatively under-colonised domain that is ripe for commercial exploitation at the same time as improving the gallery's reputation for supporting daring and innovative work. For the curator, the avant-garde represents an opportunity to construct new trends and to codify what might otherwise appear as disordered and polymorphous. Definitions are thus strategic, a situating in relation to potential allies, enemies, patrons and critics. The avant-garde is always a specific response to specific historical and social conditions, a strategy of positioning in relationship to the contemporaneous field of cultural activity.

On the Destruction of the INSTITUTION of

avant-



Martin Creed
Work No 84 1993

Installation: Wonderful Life 1993
Left: Callum Innes
Exposed Painting in Grey No 4
Back: Adam Chodzko
The God Lookalike Contest
Centre Left: J.P. Reilly
Interior No 4

Terence Bond
The Linguistic Function of Sauce
courtesy Lisson Gallery, London

The discursive field surrounding the concept of the avant-garde today is massive and manifold. But it can, at the cost of oversimplification, be divided between an 'avant-gardism' that supports that which superficially contravenes conventional forms of art, and the 'avant-garde' that works towards the total eradication of the institution of art² and by extension the whole prevailing social order. With the wide range of artistic practice that these two views encompass it soon becomes apparent that one person's avant-garde is almost certainly another person's cultural mainstream. Drawing on the evidence of recent interest in the avant-garde³ we are currently in a period characterised by

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attempts to promote the first formulation (avant-gardism) at the expense of the second (the avant-garde), resulting in the promotion of a type of 'avant-gardism for avant-gardism's sake.'

Because there is no consensus on definition each commentator is required to search out their own 'true' avant-garde and differentiate it from a 'false' avant-garde. Ownership of the label is so valuable because of the enviable position of the avant-garde in culture. To be avant-garde is to be way ahead of the rest, at the front of a massive and profitable cultural mainstream. The avant-garde banks in the present on its future profitability.

For Donald Kuspit the 'true' avant-garde artist's aim was "to undertake a sincere, risky search, carried out in social obscurity, for the touchstone primordiality that could reoriginate the self." In distinction today's 'false' avant-garde accepts "cynically, guiltlessly, a facile, impersonal formula for making art and being an artist, rather than to be a missionary converting the fallen to the faith of the true self by way of an original art."⁴ The 'neo-avant-garde', in the form of appropriation artists, is the epitome of the conservative and the reactionary because of the damage they do to the original avant-garde project. The appropriation artist strips the avant-garde of its life and purpose through his/her morbid nostalgia, decadence and narcissism. By repackaging the art of the past the appropriation artist reifies the whole avant-garde project by turning revolution into a spectacle, an image, just another art object. Plagiarists, through the appropriation of past revolutionary art, in fact only "plagiarize the reified idea of the revolution" and this only makes sure of the death or impossibility of revolutionary art in the present because "it stylizes and systematizes the very idea of artistic revolution."⁴ For Kuspit then the avant-garde artist is not far removed from the conventional view of the Modernist/Romantic artist as an heroic figure struggling to communicate transcendental truths. It is, however, just this figure and his/her construction through representations that is the target of much appropriation work. As such Kuspit's project to revive this figure puts him firmly in the avant-gardism camp, a characteristic of which is the inability to distinguish between modernism and the avant-garde.

For Neil Nehring, in his book on post-war British subcultures,⁶ the avant-garde exists to assimilate exemplary acts of contestation which exist outside of an art world that will eventually replace it. The avant-garde exists to co-ordinate and stimulate the international revolutionary consciousness and the signs of refusal and creativity that abound in popular life. As an

integrator of art and everyday life, and an intermediary between deviant subcultures and the bourgeois art world, the avant-garde attempts to break down the barriers between the elite practices of artists and the experience of lived daily reality for the masses (the destruction of difference between the artist and audience). Punk is perceived by Nehring as a model example of avant-garde discourse being integrated with popular culture. Popular culture, however, remains distinct through being incoherent, regressive and commercially compromised whereas avant-gardism remains elitist, politically pessimistic, and isolated from mass ideological movements. The oft-repeated aim, to destroy the distinction between art and everyday life through the realization and suppression of art, co-joins art, politics, and everyday life with no one realm claiming sovereignty over the others. For the moment each realm operates in the belief in its own forthcoming self-destruction and is happy "to experience its own death as an aesthetic pleasure,"⁷ as Andrew Hewitt has expressed it, a characteristic shared with fascism. Despite this notion the paradox of the avant-garde remains its status as a specialist enterprise that wants to do away with separation and specialization.⁸

This paradox brings us to the most repeatedly suppressed aspect of avant-garde activity, namely its self-consciously 'collective' identity. The historical avant-garde recognised the need to theorise and construct forms of organisation, and the possibility of eventual strategic alignment with larger social forces. The political was incorporated into the artistic not just as a subject but also as a form of organisation, modelled usually on the vanguardist integration of theory, practice and agitation. Nehring points out how the avant-garde shares most common ground with anarchism in that it rejects traditional values, centralized authority, hierarchical systems, and dogmatic parliamentary politics. Its energy derives from the dialectic of the individual and the group, and emancipation is conceived through the "free self-realization of others, in a dialectic between individual and collective."⁹ The avant-garde exists to light the fuse—control would then be given over to more extensive social forces.

Another currently overlooked indicator of avant-garde activity is the number of artists' manifestos being produced. The health of the genre usually marks periods of intense interaction between the cultural and the political and at the same time announces a commitment to collective artistic practice. In the past a manifesto was obligatory—they were the public proclamation of a movement's programme, beliefs, and demands. Manifestos were composed as strategic incursions into a realm of written and verbal discourse usually denied the artist.

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They communicated in the printed word what was not possible through the purely visual. Today, with avant-gardism, the manifesto has become a dying art form. Much of the energy that once went into it now gets used up in supplying the new genre of the press release, a form of arts marketing that at its most creative publicises subversion as it attempts to subvert publicity. The decline of the manifesto can also be put down to the rise of theory and the supplanting by the essay of its more simplistic, populist, and often militaristic and phallogocentric excesses. The manifesto, in its mixture of art discourse with political rhetoric, questioned the autonomy of both. For Andrew Hewitt, the manifesto is the key site for a dialogue between the aestheticization of politics and the politicization of aesthetics—a position that inclines disconcertingly towards the shared ideological roots of fascism and avant-gardism.

The manifesto thrived on its ability to be interpreted, on its ability to produce more 'copy.' The avant-garde keeps abreast of theoretical and critical developments because art is heavily dependent on the legitimation and publicity provided by reviewers and art critics. In addition to this recognition,

rather than totally eliminating it. The trouble, however, with the concept of 'recuperation' is that it invokes some lost 'paradise' of unrecuperated space and practice. It totalizes the utter vulnerability of all actions to appropriation.

The concept of recuperation does reveal how avant-gardism becomes merely one mediated role amongst others that can be adopted; where rebellion becomes image of rebellion. Seduced by this image avant-gardism advocates only compliance through the production of more images and objects. However, the 'true' avant-garde also cannot claim it is not exploitable in the present conditions. All it can attempt is to make this exploitation dangerous for the exploiters through such tactics as making the process visible. The avant-garde thus stimulates just what it ostensibly hopes to destroy. It has become more obviously market orientated, with the market, institution, and commodification becoming the subject as well as the context.

The three books mentioned here indicate the perpetual state of crisis that the discourse of avant-gardism inhabits. Now, as ever, is a time of deep questioning of the need for a contemporary

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careerism of the artist**

reaction is also sought after in the pages of the popular press, which stands in place of the reaction of society at large, as representative of the 'public.' To annoy the popular press is a sign that one's message is hitting home (the more outraged the reaction the better). Avant-garde art, like media scams and pranks, is looking to incorporate this reaction into the work itself. Here Kuspit makes a distinction between the avant-garde artist who is 'found' by fame and the neo-avant-garde artist who 'seeks' fame. The pseudo-avant-garde "assumes that avant-garde art is a means to the end of fame and fortune, not a thing with intrinsic value."¹⁰ That the historical avant-garde were also deeply involved in the process of self-promotion is not acknowledged by Kuspit.

The late eighties and the early nineties have seen a series of exhibitions rejuvenating, re-inventing and promoting sixties and seventies avant-gardism represented by such movements as the Situationist International, Fluxus and Viennese Actionism. What is new about these attempts at codification and containment through representation is that they took place so soon after the movement's active period. The speed with which cultural dissidents become the darlings of the establishment art world is worthy of note—today this process is becoming almost simultaneous. The art world, regulated and administered by the few galleries, magazines, and museums interested in contemporary art, controls the meaning and value of art through its institutional context; a framework that also orientates debate about the functions and types of works of art that are acceptable. The dominant culture maintains its dominance by institutionalizing or recuperating the radical

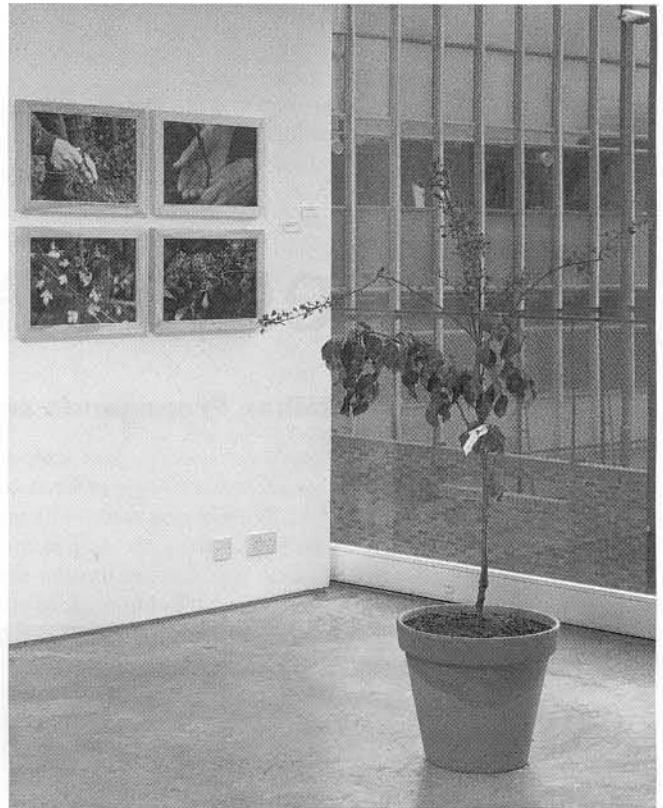
avant-garde. With postmodernism, the idea of progress in art, as a continuous process of formal and aesthetic innovation, has come to be exhausted: "the essence of modernity as we have traditionally thought it is its incompleteness, the impossibility of ruling out yet more radical negation, yet more startling innovation. A modernism that is somehow 'completed' will be decidedly anti- or postmodern; it will be an avant-garde."¹¹ There is no longer any connection between artistic innovation and the logic of the precedent and the antecedent. Culture now operates in an environment of simultaneity, raiding the archive with impunity. In the absence of this metanarrative of progress the traditional avant-garde's function—to be an advance guard that leads the following army into new territory for colonisation—becomes redundant. Radicalism in the art world is now inextricably linked to the careerism of the artist. In this sense it becomes necessary to question the over-determination vested in the 'new' in the discourse of avant-gardism. The idea of the new for its own sake is totally integrated with the discourse of commercial and corporate sponsorship of the arts, such as this example from Philip Morris Europe: "Just as the artist endeavours to improve his interpretation and conceptions through innovation, the commercial entity strives to improve its end product or service through experimentation with new methods and materials. Our constant search for a new and better way in which to perform and produce is akin to the questionings of the artists."¹² To speak of the avant-garde only in terms of aesthetic innovation is therefore to normalise them as key players in a self-regenerating and dynamic art market. A market that can handle, and indeed requires, an infinite variety of new styles and new forms of art making.

Does then the present situation enable us to work towards or recognise an avant-garde today that can be validly compared to that of the past? The present conditions can only lead us to the view that the avant-garde cannot exist in the way it once did and that it is necessary to rethink just what can constitute avant-garde practice today. That this is necessary can be put down to three important factors. The first is its unprecedented institutionalization, the fact that past avant-garde art now functions as official art within galleries, museums and education systems. The second factor has to do with the accommodation of pluralism; the avant-garde is accepted as just one more approach amongst others and there becomes no one identifiable culture to contest. Further erosion of the 'difference' of the avant-garde comes about through the appropriation by both mass and high culture of many of the avant-garde's own tactics and techniques. The third factor is the changing concept of the political in art, with the waning of the productivist model, the attention given to the politics of representation, and the lack of belief in the strength of the proletariat leaving the cadre elite with no mass to follow its example.

Although it is necessarily subject to imprecise usage, avant-gardism remains identifiable, but the avant-garde continues to escape categorisation. The ideology of avant-gardism is the dominant model of artistic production today. The avant-garde, caught-up in its own discourse, is suffering from a lack of original moves to make in an over-analysed endgame. This situation of stasis and equilibrium, with no one side having any winning positions, clearly suits one side more than the other. It is now up to production to lead theory out of its aporias, a production so different that it may be necessary to call it something other than 'avant-garde.' But because of its cultural dominance it seems to me that the proper target for the avant-garde today entails a kind of infanticide, a destruction of the institution of avant-gardism. The aim, as always, will be to attempt to construct a concept of the avant-garde pertinent to our contemporary situation.

Notes

- 1 See Donald D. Egbert, The idea of 'avant-garde' in art and politics. *American Historical Review*, vol. 73, no. 2, December 1967, pp339-66
- 2 See Peter Burger, *Theory of the avant-garde*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984
- 3 See the series presented by the 'Avant-' *Guardian*, "Who's afraid of the avant-garde" which to date has featured articles by amongst others Terry Eagleton, James Hall, and Deyan Sudjic, each Friday during September and October, 1993
- 4 Donald Kuspit, *The cult of the avant-garde artist*. Cambridge University Press, 1993
- 5 *Ibid*, p111
- 6 Neil Nehring, *Flowers in the dustbin: culture, anarchy, and post-war England*. University of Michigan Press, 1993
- 7 Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist modernism: aesthetics, politics, and the avant-garde*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993 p173
- 8 For a discussion of the many productive aporias of the avant-garde see Paul Mann, *The theory-death of the avant-garde*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991
- 9 Nehring, *op. cit.* p165
- 10 Kuspit, *op. cit.* p108
- 11 Hewitt, *op. cit.* p45
- 12 John A. Murphy, Sponsor's statement for 'When attitudes become form' (1969), in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds), *Art in theory, 1900-1990: an anthology of changing ideas*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, p886



Christopher Bucklow with Robert Garner *Fear-Hawthorn Tree* 1990-93 photo Stephen White courtesy Lisson Gallery



cartoon from *The Exploding Cinema*, Brixton

Operation

Balkan Propaganda and

its western bedfellows

Irma



above top Medak, Sept '93
photo J Hanan
above Zagreb, Sept '93
photo S. Winter

In the western anglophone media, the story of the former Yugoslavia has become the story of wounded children, heroically saved by western, often individual efforts. This narrow focus threatens to implicate the western media more seriously than ever in the comprehensive propaganda war raging in the former Yugoslavia.

In a war in which electricity, drinking water and humanitarian aid are used for strategic military purposes by all sides, it is not surprising that information is used in the same way. Certainly the Serbian and Croatian governments were very quick to realize the power of television, and have energetically set out to put it to their own use. It is an almost commonly held view that nationalist propaganda has been one of the main causes of this war in the first place. The short-term interests of the western news media have not helped to counter this manipulation of information to a significant extent. From the beginning, the atrocities of war received more airtime than any attempt to analyse the political situation and the role of the international community. This has especially been the case since the favoured alliance of the Moslem-led BiH forces and the HVO (Bosnian Croat defence council) fell apart in May 1993. The Geneva negotiations having been resumed on a basis that would reward ethnic cleansing, the current moral stance has been reduced merely to stating that "shelling little children is bad."

Before I arrived in Zagreb in August, I was informed about this war mainly through tv news coverage by CNN and some terrestrial stations. Never receiving enough information to form any kind of overview, I more or less resigned myself to the confusion, almost giving up on trying to form an opinion on international policy in the conflict. I believed that my reaction was not an uncommon one, and that it could help to explain the rather passive pessimism that surrounds public opinion on the subject. Now I believe that there may be many more serious consequences of this relative crisis in reportage.

From the point of view of western governments—most notably the British—the outrageously over-exposed 'Operation Irma' in August served the political goal of diverting attention from the fact that the Geneva negotiations failed to uphold the principle of multi-ethnic citizenship. 'Operation Irma,' in which wounded children were evacuated from Sarajevo to various western hospitals, even managed to secure a new humanitarian triumph for the participants, while the mounting ferocity of the

BIH-HVO conflict went more or less unreported until the United Nations reached Mostar and exposed the destruction of the BIH-held East bank.

The subsequent story of Sally Becker had all the ingredients required to absorb much of the media attention: an individual effort saving the lives of poor innocent children, a dangerous frontline to cross, and lots of graphic horror close-ups. When the UN negotiations to leave Mostar 'failed,' Sally Becker succeeded in convincing both sides to let her cross the frontline with an HVO ambulance full of wounded Moslem children. For Sky News this was another occasion to claim a humanitarian victory for Britain. At the same time, the extraordinary cooperation Becker received from the HVO, and her frequent expressions of gratitude to 'the Croats' left ample room for speculation. But whatever her personal motivation, playing up the support of the HVO effectively counterbalanced some of the bad press caused by the exposure of the whole situation; one might almost forget that it was the same HVO that had shelled these children in the first place.

Since the HVO is becoming a public relations liability to the Croatian government itself, the wider ramifications of this should not be underestimated. Significantly, upon his return to Zagreb from Mostar, the UNPROFOR (UN Protection Force) Head of Civil Affairs for the first time openly stated in a press conference that HV (Croatian Army) forces were present and active in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although initially unreported in the international media, this admission was extremely sensitive, since Serbia is under an economic embargo precisely because of its "contribution to the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina." The already strained relationship between the UN and the Croatian authorities has deteriorated ever since, resulting in the Sabor (parliament) voting against the extension of UNPROFOR's mandate, due for September 30th. However, with the acceptance of an extension of the mandate under Resolution 871, Croatia's President Tudjman is widely believed to have given in to pressure from the Security Council.

Croatia's uneasy loyalty to the HVO, and its concern with its international reputation was illustrated in late October by the local media coverage of the massacre of Moslem civilians in Stupni Do, near Vares in central Bosnia. Initially the major Zagreb dailies carried the HVO release that the UN investigation team "did not find any trace of a massacre of civilians," but it was followed the next day with reports of the Croatian Foreign Minister's call for the prosecution of the perpetrators, with one editorial emphasizing that "this is vital for the future international standing of Croats."

In this light, the significance of previous events in the Medak pocket, near the Dalmatian coast, have largely been missed by the international media. On September 9th, the HV overran three Serb-held villages in the pocket, leaving 70 confirmed dead, most of whom are thought to be civilians. A Croatian military investigation, conducted after pressure from UNPROFOR, reached its conclusion in a matter of days: only a few armed civilians had been killed in legitimate self-defence. The case is now under investigation by the UN War Crimes Commission.

As a result, tension is high in Croatia, and many believe both parties are preparing for another all-out war. In Bosnia, the "three warring factions" are splitting into ever more localised subfactions and alliances. In Pale, a power-struggle is apparently raging between Karadzic and his military commander, General

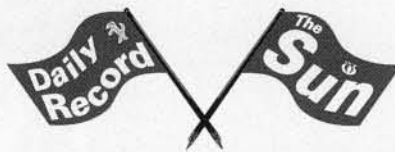
*"It is an almost
commonly held view that
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this war in the first place"*

Mladic. In Northern Bosnia, Serb forces are actively assisting the HVO in their blockade of the mostly Muslim towns of Maglaj and Tesanj. In the Bihac enclave, the separatist Moslem leader Fikrit Abdic is quite openly courting Zagreb by criticising Izetbegovic for "encouraging sanctions on Croatia." As the Croatian Sabor is considering a new media bill, Serbia is gearing up for elections in which, as last year, the only issue on which the opposition is united is Milosevic's exclusive access

to state television. Still the western media prefer to highlight medical evacuations of wounded Bosnians who are graciously received by governments around the world. Wounded children are a favourite item with all the local stations, instilling fear and contempt of the barbaric behaviour of the other side. As long as the western international media makes no real effort to analyse the background of this war, it does nothing to help prevent these atrocities in the long term.

a mans a man for a' that...

CHEAP COPY



**OUT OF OTHER
PEOPLES
MISERY**

*Raising the Double Standard
for Scotland*

Hypocrisy! Innuendo! Misogyny! Banality! SUCCESSFUL!

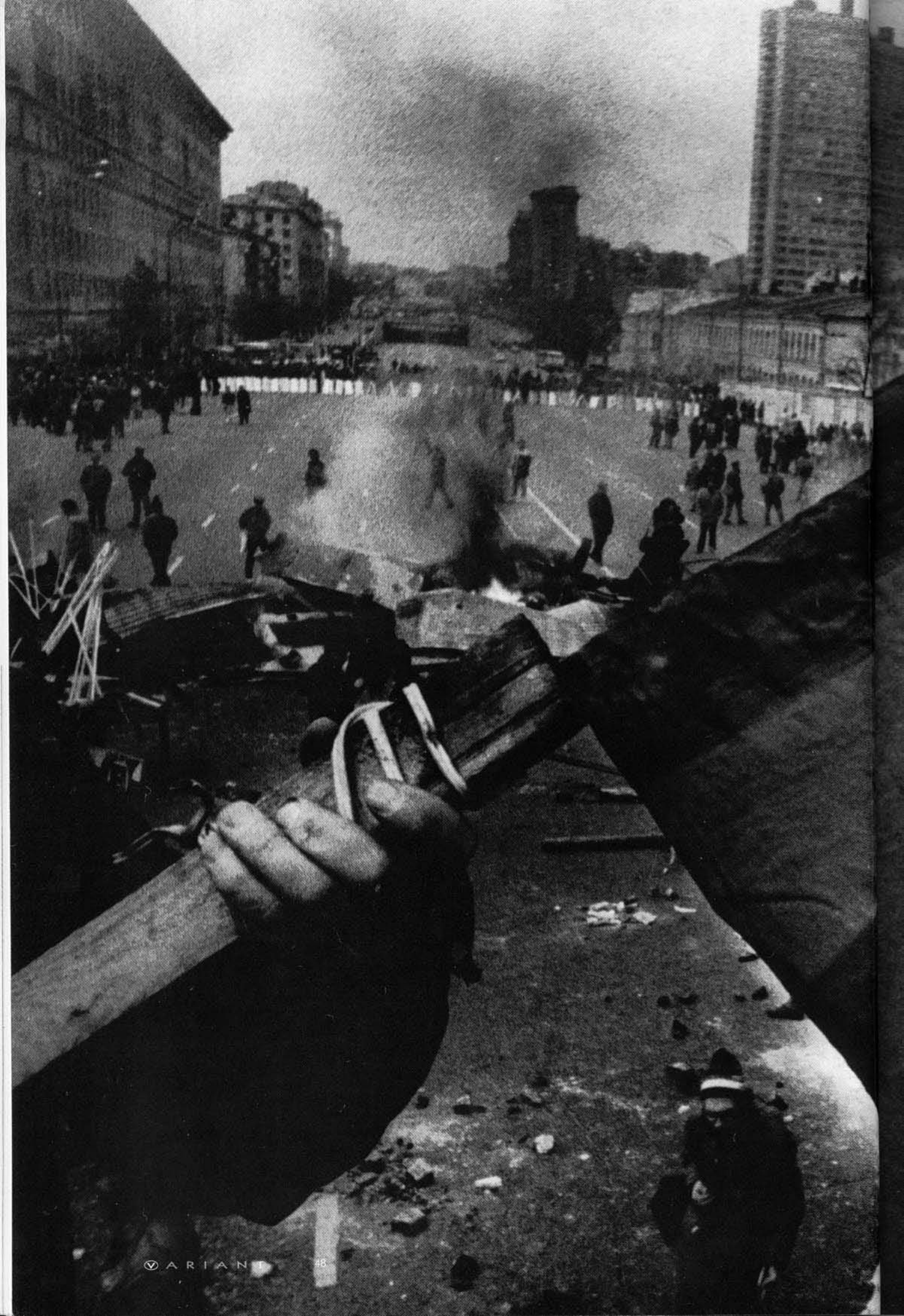




Photo by Martin Hunter

On The Edge of Democracy

On an inner Moscow ring road, demonstrators and riot police struggle to gain control of a route to the White House. The next day, the rebels in the White House were shelled into submission by Army tanks—and another action of civil & political disobedience to President Yeltsin's 'reform by starvation' was silenced.

Reversing

Alastair Dickson reports on a new critique of class reform tactics

enlightenment



In the mid '80s, Stefan Szczelkun circulated drafts of a text on *Artists' Liberation* for discussion. Subsequently, in his two books *Collaborations* and *Class Myths and Culture*, as well as in the Working Press project which he co-instituted, he has been working through some of the issues raised by the *Artists' Liberation* text.

Artists' Liberation and the earlier Working Press books were built around a claim for 'working class culture.' This stands as a challenging term, as it raises questions of the extent to which people and communities are subject or object of their own lives. Only by asserting that people *can* substantially make their own lives, can the term adequately cover the intended programme of self-motivated activity which doesn't pander to received pronunciation/received taste. As Szczelkun notes, the domination of capital "blasted the stout heart of radical modern working-class culture, reducing it to a smouldering ruin which was over-run by cheap and distracting commodities... Whilst we are chained to the linear and brutal cash nexus we will continue to be working class..." [p4]. So Working Press was born with the need to explore and explain its own working criteria.

The Conspiracy of Good Taste is deliberately personal in tone. "This is a quality of knowledge which has yet to find adequate recognition in the pantheon of learned sources and yet most of us are motivated and directed, limited or inspired by just such subjective knowledge" [p1]. Unlike most books published today, the book is not reheated thesis-fodder, not an academic's staking out of a claim to his/her own piece of territory. It has been constructed as the author has been researching and developing his position, so it bears the marks of the texts read. Quotations from source books would have survived as mere name-checking in the final text of an academic book, whereas here they remain as quotations in their own right. The book can function as a handbook, for author and reader alike.

It may be the most provocative of Szczelkun's

books, as it tries to tackle the question of what 'working class culture' might be by reviewing some well-meaning upper-class socialists' attempts to define it from above. The core of the book focuses on three such figures in turn: William Morris, Cecil Sharp and Clough Williams-Ellis.

Like others, these figures tried to find a panacea for capital's corrosion of traditional culture. Their own life experiences identified the culture dominated by capital as failing to live up to the culture's own ideals, which they privileged as 'good taste.' They therefore aimed to preserve and reconstruct traditions. However, that was achieved at the expense of dismissing that which didn't fit in with their ideas. They were treating particular ideas of 'good taste' as value-free, good for all people at all times. And, having defined working people as victims rather than subjects of their own lives, the well-meaning social critics reconstructed traditions to omit many features of genuine popular culture which had failed to meet their standards of good taste.

For example, in their views on housing, the social critics tended to conflate the jerry-built speculative housing developments with self-built 'shanties' which sprang up whenever people saw an opportunity to create their own environment. High-minded social critics created an 'issue,' a need to protect from corporate excess, which was then 'resolved' by passing protective legislation. Town Planning emerged as a specialist field; the specialist New Class had another point of intrusion into people's lives. The devastation of the cities and the 'clientization' of the population was the result.

There are inevitably points at which some of the necessary rethinking isn't pursued. An example is the discussion of William Morris in relation to Guild Socialism, which is dismissed as a form of medieval nostalgia, some of whose supporters became fascists (p22). It may have merely been an archaic fantasy sold-on by upper-class socialists.

The Conspiracy of Good Taste

Stefan Szczelkun

Working Press 1993

£9.95 hb, 136pp ISBN 1 870736 69 9

However, there is more to be done on recovering and re-evaluating the forms of radicalism which failed to survive the Bolshevik 'success'; Guild Socialism was such a form, one which was echoed in Kropotkin's anarchism. Their possibilities and worth have to be reassessed outside the short-circuits induced by capitalist and Marxist progressivism.

Other examples occur in the chapter on *A Short History of Good Taste*. Szczelkun prefers a particular 20th century notion of 'essence' which is deployed around depth psychology's concept of repression. The sense of self-knowledge to which modern therapeutics purport to lead us is repeatedly contrasted with the inauthentic staging of the self in the 18th century. Paradoxically, the book does relate that staging to the needs of the developing capitalist mode of production, but leaves the modern deployment of 'knowledge' on the side of enlightenment. That enlightenment is not presented as bound to a wider social agenda, such as the extending power of pseudo-therapeutic social agencies (or some self-styled 'cultural workers') to mediate others' lives, which is ominously like a latter-day heir to the upper-class socialists' reform programmes.

As Szczelkun points out in his conclusion, what is discussed in his book "is not a quirk of English aristocratic eccentricity but may be found operating in any urbanised area, anywhere in the world... Good taste has been successful in emasculating urban peoples' cultures in all industrialised countries" [p17]. Mediation and re-presentation of our cultural identities, then and now, must be recognised. "As we enter the twenty-first century we must insist on cultural autonomy and mean it" [p18]. *The Conspiracy of Good Taste* is a useful contribution towards that process.

Symbols of Survival—

The Art of Will MacLean

Duncan MacMillan, Mainstream Publishing
£14.99 hb, 120 pp, 88 illus ISBN 1 85158 419 6

Will MacLean's work is haunted by a sense of exile and motivated by a desire to overcome it, to recover or to understand that which has been lost. It is an intensely felt, personal art which speaks with the voice of myth, a myth in which he can articulate the individual and contingent within a much longer temporal perspective. The object of his visual meditations, which never changes, is the culture of the Highlands and its tragedy. Of current art that I know, MacLean's involves the most purely personal effort at recovery through the power of memory and imagination. Though the comparison is flattering, I am reminded of Anselm Kiefer's need to draw back to the surface that which comfortable life would prefer suppressed.

Like Kiefer, MacLean is engrossed in history. He approaches it through the material of family and childhood and through the witness of poetry and archaeology. He could be called a scholarly artist, for in this also he represents a Highland value system, the high esteem of learning and teaching. Only in his 1973-74 project, *The Ring Net*, might he be called didactic, however, belonging as it does to other domains of knowledge as much as to art. It is the texture of an emotional, intuitive reality that he pursues. *Symbols of Survival* is a detailed, lucid and sympathetic account of

MacLean's work up to 1991. Duncan MacMillan describes MacLean's gradual evolution towards his mature work over ten years, from early uncertainties to his breakthrough in the years 1973-75. What emerges from the book is the singular commitment MacLean has had to his subject through all changes of media. The foundations of his work were laid carefully in the period up to 1975 and have been built upon without interruption since.

MacMillan roots MacLean's work in three elements: the link, through his father, to the Gaelic past, "a bridge back into that disappearing world," and then, linked to this by a psychic cord, a fascination with archaeology, and finally, an equal fascination with museology. In the power of ancient artefacts to stimulate interpretation and imagination he perhaps found the suggestion which helped him develop the mythic imagery which coalesced in the mid-'70s. It has informed his work (sometimes, I think, to its detriment) ever since.

We are not, unfortunately, shown much of his work from before 1973, a period which contained exhibitions at the 57 Gallery (1968) and with Demarco (1970), both in Edinburgh. Do the Pop/abstract influences of *Fisherman with Broken Arm* or *Boarding Herring* (1973) give some clue to what it was like? Be that as it may, by 1975, in paintings like *Three Fires*, *Achanaird* and in contemporary drawings, the themes of landscape, fishing and ritual were beginning to move together into a unified, distinctive vision.

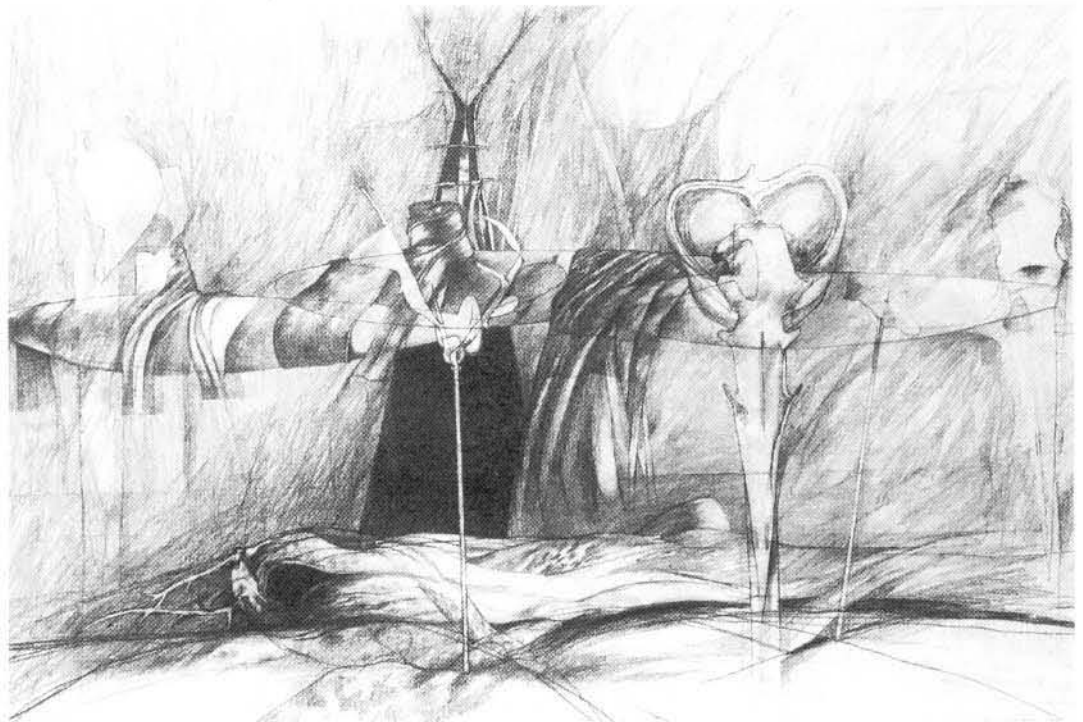
It was MacLean's drawings which most impressed me at that time and MacMillan also considers that the constructions surpass the paintings. I am sure he is right. MacLean is at his least certain with paint and all his best paintings rely heavily on linear structure. His constructions include boxes, reliefs and full sculpture. I prefer those with the least applied pigment, or perhaps more accurately, those least dependent on paint for pictorial effect, finding the spatial, illusionistic suggestions incongruous. I also resist those in which he becomes too fussy, too absorbed in working up rich patinas, aged surfaces and ambiguous, intriguing shapes. In these he has a tendency to let his loving craftsmanship smother clear expression.

In recent years MacLean has become a productive printmaker and I have a sneaking feeling that these might just be his best work. *A Night of Islands* uses all his draughtsmanly skills and his passionate knowledge of the Clearances, harnessed to the power of an austere etching technique, to make memorable images. Perhaps his newest project, *The Emigrant Ship* (in homage to McTaggart), will substantiate this speculation.

Duncan MacMillan's book is a welcome addition to the slowly growing but still very inadequate literature on living Scottish artists. I wonder who will be next—and when.

Euan MacArthur

Hunter's Vision 1989



In The Fascist Bathroom

Writings on Punk 1977-1992

Greil Marcus

Viking, London 1993 £16.99 hb, 438pp.

ISBN 0 670 83845 4

To Greil Marcus, punk means the Sex Pistols, Elvis Costello, Bruce Springsteen and others. He justifies this selection of subject matter on the grounds that "punk is infinitely more than a musical style." This is all very well, if one is able to understand genre as something that is subject to constant renegotiation. Marcus, however, is a fundamentalist who credits the Sex Pistols—and Johnny Rotten in particular—with originating punk. It would be a mistake

to oppose this conceit with another, by suggesting that either the Stooges, the Velvet Underground or the Kingsmen were the 'first punk band.' Instead, it should be recognised that punk is part of a discourse whose parameters are constantly shifting.

As a fundamentalist, Marcus tends to see

the world in dualistic terms, as a battle between good and evil. Thus he uses 'evil' skinheads and Oi music as a foil against which to pit bands like the Au Pairs, the Gang of Four and Delta 5. Having set up this Manichean system, Marcus abandons any need for critical insight and instead resorts to knee-jerk prejudice: "The Oi groups—which purvey a version of 1977 punk stripped of its humour and vision—exist only to be followed... selling their fans a fraudulent, vicarious membership in the band."

In my experience, skinhead groups tend to treat the people who go to their gigs as friends rather than fans—and given that the music they play is commercially unviable (thanks to the efforts of music hacks, major labels won't release Oi records), it's difficult to see how any deep-rooted star system could develop in this scene. Likewise, Oi plays up the music hall aspects of punk, with humour emphasised in 'key' slogans such as 'having a laugh and having a say.' The only skinhead record mentioned in the 'Citations' section of this book is *Strength Thru Oi*. Of the twenty-two cuts, the following are 'joke' or 'novelty' tracks: *She Goes to Fino's* and *Deidre's A Slag* by the Toy Dolls; *Beans* by Barney Rubble; *We're Pathétique* and *Isubaleene* by Splodge; and *Harbour Mafia*

Mantra by the Shaven Heads. Marcus fails to give any indication of the records' content because to do so would destroy his contention that Oi is punk music "stripped of its humour."

Marcus takes punk far too seriously, he considers it "a new social critique," when it chiefly consists of throwaway gestures. His literalism is ludicrous: "A NIGHT OF TREASON, promised a poster for a concert by the Clash in 1976, and that might have summed it up: a new music called punk for lack of anything better, as treason against superstar music you were supposed to love but which you could view only from a distance; against the future society had planned for you; against your own impulse to say yes...". I can remember a slogan used to advertise another Clash concert a year or two later, "THE LAST BIG EVENT BEFORE WE ALL GO TO JAIL." However, I didn't go to jail. Instead, I left school and went to a technical college to take A-levels. The Clash didn't go to jail either. As Marcus relates, they cracked the all-important American market, simultaneously "turning rebellion into money." The handful of people from 'the scene' who ended up in jail, such as Hugh Cornwall of the Stranglers, generally did a couple of months for drug offences.

Like most journalism preserved between hardcovers, this book makes dull reading because the writing is repetitious and ephemeral. This is compounded by the author's pretentiousness and the fact that he uses 'the list' as an organising principle in many of his pieces. In fact, beyond Jamie Reid's cover design, there's nothing to recommend this tome at all. More insidious is the writer's reputation as a cultural 'insider,' a well-connected man who should not be crossed by anyone hoping to 'make it' in the States. The humanist hacks who review books for a living still swallow the myth of the 'powerful man' and this is why Marcus generally receives 'good' notices in the 'quality' press. For example, in the *Sunday Times* of 6 June 1993, Julie Burchill writes: "Marcus is so persuasive that he can actually make you want to go out and listen to a record by a lousy band such as the Gang of Four or the Delta 5... by the time you finish this book, you can't help but feel a slight twinge of sadness that such a clever man as Marcus has spent his whole life writing about music." *In The Fascist Bathroom* is silly and should be ignored. What we need to deal with is a cultural system that spews out book reviews by brown-noses who soft-peddle valid criticisms because they lack the guts to confront a middle-aged man who looks for 'the meaning of life' in a plastic platter.

Stewart Home

Power Plays, Power Works

John Fiske

Verso, London & New York 1993

£12.95 323pp 12 illus

ISBN 0 86041 616 2

This book is about the 'cultural wars' in contemporary society. It deals mostly with the situation in the USA, but parallels can readily be found in other countries of the self-styled First World. While accepting a postmodernist world without any unifying narratives, 'objective' observers or fixed categories by which society can be explained once and for all, the author nevertheless believes it possible to write a book directed to understanding specific social struggles that have clear structural oppositions within their poststructural conditions.

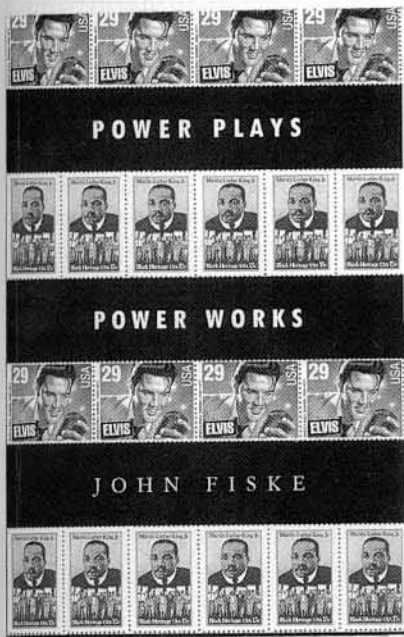
He modestly adds that "this form of poststructuralism can, I believe, do for the late twentieth century what critical structural analysis did for its third quartile."

The theoretical underpinning comes from Gramsci and Foucault, each being made to fill out the gaps in the other. Gramsci allowed for shifting and fluid alliances in society, but still, as a Marxist, saw them as ultimately tied to fixed and identifiable social (class) interests; Foucault detached power from social structures so completely that he forgot that some people benefit from it more than others—though all are, to a variable extent, both beneficiaries and victims. Fiske dissociates power from a categorically identifiable ruling class, but introduces the notion of the *power-bloc* which has 'privileged access' to the mechanisms of power. In popular knowledge the power block is referred to as 'the upper echelons' or simply 'them.' On the receiving end of power are 'the formations of the people,' not fixed groups but ad hoc alliances nucleated around particular and changing issues. Their consent to the power exercised upon them is 'nice, but not necessary.'

In traditional ideology theory the disadvantaged do not rebel because, being duped by the ruling power's ability to define 'the truth' in its own interests, they are not aware of their disadvantage. But no such false consciousness clouds the minds of, for example, black people in the USA. They know their subjection perfectly well. They also know the extent of the power ranged against them: which is quite adequate to explain why, for the most part, they keep their heads down.

The argument "that the consensus model of American society has outlived its usefulness for everyone except those in control" is hardly news, especially given demographic projections which generally





agree that by early next century persons of European descent will no longer form the majority of the US population. So instead of uniculturalism and a single top-down power, there will be—it already exists in embryonic form—a plurality of *localizing powers*. In Fiske's vision, "we are in the process of changing our social order into one where social differences are respected and power

differences reduced, and in which the points of interface are negotiated into points of consent rather than conflict, that is, into a society of multiple points of consent rather than one of singular consensus."

Localizing powers have the function, among others, of resisting the *epistemological hegemony* of the power-bloc. There is no longer one knowledge, able to dismiss what it can't assimilate as unreal and thus not worth inquiring into, but a diversity of *knowledges*.

"Knowledge produces not truth, but power—or rather, power disguised as truth." [FOUCAULT]

Multiple powers, multiple knowledges. Fiske gives the instance of Elvis Presley fans who defy the official 'fact' that Elvis is dead by their certain knowledge that he is still alive. This is a weak example, since it can easily be dismissed as wish-fulfilling delusion; but when it comes to Black and Native American people who have their own quite distinctive way of knowing the 'facts' of history, he is much more impressive. (Similarly, the British know that their system of law is essentially just—occasional lapses can be put right. The Irish, I suspect, have a rather different knowledge). The political-cultural task, then, is to centre these marginal knowledges, while relativizing, and

hence marginalizing, that of the centre—an activity analogous to deconstruction in literature: "To deconstruct the imagination of the power-bloc."

Power Plays, Power Works is a bit long-winded and gets repetitive at times, but it is written in a very straightforward way, refreshingly free of the pompous gobbledegook with which some writers on cultural studies disguise their want of clear thinking. The book is strategically useful if you share the author's optimism that those who have access to power will see that change is inevitable. But, as Fiske himself sees, a threatened power-bloc is apt to retrench itself and to repress the margins even more harshly than before—note the behaviour of the present British government with regard to education and 'family policy,' as well as the disgraceful scapegoating of New Age travellers. I think also that he sometimes forgets himself and treats his own categories like the fixed social classes of Marxism. And one area is hardly touched on—perhaps the most fascinating of all: the relations of these powers and knowledges within the individual psyche.

Nevertheless this is an interesting and highly readable book, if not a startlingly original one.

Simon Brown

Letter Bile with your Bristles

Three things surprised me about Euan MacArthur's review of my book *Contemporary Painting in Scotland*. First that *Variant* should take that much interest in such a clapped-out means of artistic expression as painting. Secondly that your reviewer should spend such an inordinate number of words on flogging such dead donkeys as your average Scottish painter (yet flog 'em he does with all the righteous conviction of the Duchess in *Alice in Wonderland*). And thirdly that you, as editor, should kindly allow me to reply to MacArthur's attacks, which I perceived, rightly or wrongly, as more directed against the artists in my book rather than the author himself.

I will take up your offer of reply, but will be as brief as possible. First because I do not feel that any artist who was attacked by your reviewer needs me to defend them, and secondly, I do not wish to use up invaluable space in the only magazine dealing with contemporary art in Scotland. This is a scandalous state of affairs, but that is another matter.

To return to the issue at hand, I, for my part, felt that despite the savagery of Euan MacArthur's onslaught, there were certain and some might even say fundamental inconsistencies in his criticisms of the current state of Scottish painting. Let me give just two examples of what I mean. Not surprisingly MacArthur has a strong antipathy towards the RSA (Royal Scottish Academy), and as you would expect has little time for those artists who are either members of that malign body or who secretly aspire to be so. This being the case, you would hardly have then expected that Sandy Frazer, an academic to the very tips of his sable brushes, would be held up as one of Scotland's finest living painters.

I will now briefly turn to what seems to me another example of inconsistency in MacArthur's critical views. After a great outpouring of verbal bile against the current state of painting in Scotland in general and specifically singled-out artists in particular, MacArthur finally throws in a suggestion as to how this awful state of affairs might be rectified. What he proposes is that painting, if it is to survive into the third millennium must begin a dialogue with other media; presumably of the more recent, up-to-date type.

I'm not sure how seriously to take this proposal, particularly when one of the few artists MacArthur gives his seal of approval to is Callum Innes, whose work is about as fine an example of pure hermetic painting as you are likely to come across this side of a good Frank Stella. I must admit that personally I do not view the idea of such an inter-media dialogue with much enthusiasm. For me it forebodes a typical postmodern recipe for disaster, where all vestiges of autonomy are sacrificed for a great stew of fashionable eclecticism which quickly turns sour in the mouth. 'Dialogues' can quickly develop into take-over bids and painting, if it follows MacArthur's suggestion, could easily go down the same road as sculpture and end in a similar morass of confusion and lack of identity which now reigns within that medium.

As I have always maintained, painting should, whenever appropriate, engage itself with the state of the world as it finds it. Yet if it is to make a lively and meaningful contribution to the public debate on contemporary moral, political, social and aesthetic values it must retain its own distinct voice and its own particular integrity.

Bill Hare

the New Primitives

*Primitive wisdom. Unsullied by our foul century.
Untouched, ancient, natural.
A utopia of return*

THE NEW PRIMITIVISM,
from new age tribalists, to
the ‘mythopoetic’ new
men’s movement, to
‘ethnic’ body art,
seem to share some
common longings.
Somewhere, far into the
past, somewhere
into the heart of
darkness, they
beckon us...



Unfortunately, the deeper you go, the further away from 'civilization' you penetrate, the more sickeningly familiar it all becomes. For what, I will be arguing, the new primitivism is actually offering, or repackaging, is a veritable chorus-line of colonial and imperialist fantasies, fantasies about the 'dark' Other, that libidinous, spontaneous, natural, irrational, child-like Other which has animated European fears and desires for centuries. The new primitivism draws from a deep well sure enough, but it is the well of the racist Western imaginary.

Playing with the symbols and artifacts of 'other cultures' is not in itself the problem. The argument that 'white' people or 'black' people should, somehow, stick to their 'own' discrete cultural patches is clearly as unworkable as it is reactionary. Generally speaking, the fluid socially constructed categories of race don't deserve respect but transgression. It is only when the process of cultural adaption and adoption becomes entangled with authoritarian and racist myths that it gets objectionable. And that is precisely what has happened with today's new primitives.

To find out just how this has happened I want to look in more detail at the three varieties of new primitivism already introduced.

THE TRIBALIST WITHIN

Let's kick off with the new age tribalists. Over the past couple of years new age tribalism's most famous representatives in Britain have been the 40-odd souls who formed the Donga tribe encampment near Winchester. However, although the Dongas, and their resistance to the motorway development of Twyford Down, caught the headlines, they are just one example of a much wider movement. In both America and the British Isles interest in the benefits of tribal lifestyles has been sprouting out all over. From teepee villagers in Wales to eco-warriors in California, 'primitive' values are being offered both as a subversion of, and panacea to, decadent Western society.

In his recent book *Millennium: Tribal Wisdom and the Modern World*, the American new tribalist guru David Matbury-Lewis explains that, "In traditional societies, people are valuable; in modern societies, things are valuable. Tribal societies..." he continues, "have always had a strong sense of the interconnectedness of things on this earth and beyond," whilst modern ones are concerned only with "the dignity and rights of the individual." Thus, whilst the modernisation of 'our' societies "unleashed human energy and creativity," it also tore 'us' away from the possibility of a more natural and holistic way of life.

These kind of sentiments give off such a powerful whiff of right-on liberal sensitivity that criticizing them initially feels a bit dastardly; the moral equivalent of torching an Oxfam shop. Nevertheless, the image of the eternal, unchanging, eco-idyllic, 'noble savage' they rely on is a far less benign creation than might at first be imagined.

The new tribalists' stereotype of non-Western peoples as passively submitting to the embrace of timeless tradition, as being unable to act with "energy or creativity," effectively freezes them out of world history. The authentic non-European culture is connoted not as something mutable, or living, but as a monolithic slab of eternal values; something that is forever in danger of being despoiled by the mere fact of change.

These kind of fantasies are rooted in a set of colonial mythologies about the character of non-white societies. The misinterpretation of such societies as static and without history was a common error of 19th and 20th century imperialists. In part it was an error that sprang from cultural arrogance—a refusal to take other people's political and cultural experiences seriously. It was, however, misapprehension with suspiciously convenient repercussions for the colonial project. For the static, traditional society was, post-contact, necessarily a doomed one, unable to 'cope' with the modern world. On the other hand, those societies that failed to perish suitably romantically, but actively and creatively resisted imperial power, were deemed to be necessarily inauthentic, and thus legitimate targets for Western 'assistance' and influence.

As all this implies, neither new tribalists nor old colonists can muster much respect for 'spoiled' peoples, those sorry cultures which have 'sold-out' by actually changing over the past 200 years. Only the pure ones, those conveniently tiny and unthreatening groups on the brink of extinction, uncorrupted tribal people, deserve, it seems, our wistful sighs.

However, perhaps the most objectionable use that the myth of primitivism is put to by the new tribalists is to legitimize tradition. Traditional authority, built up over the centuries, handed down by elders, is portrayed as being 'deep wisdom,' as inviolable. An interesting example of this kind of veneration emerges through the attempt to encode new tribalism itself as a reflection of a deep, national-folkloric, consciousness. "Call us indigenous Albion," proclaims one Donga tribesperson. Sam, one of the founders of the group, points out that Twyford Down "was the heart of tribal culture. It was the tribal centre of old England, of old Europe really." Another Donga explains, "We are trying to re-establish our roots as indigenous people. When it comes down to saving the land, we felt on a par with the Aborigines and Native Americans. We've all had our culture trashed."

Legitimizing the new primitivism by portraying it as a reflection of real national values is a common discourse amongst new age tribalists. And perhaps that's understandable. After all, the elision of the myths of primitivism and nationalism enables them to fulfil their ultimate desire and really 'go native.' Somewhat ironically 'non-white' people, the original subject of nativist romances, are excluded from the fun. Wherever else it might be, 'indigenous Albion' isn't located in Southall or Brixton. African Londoners and Asian Liverpudlians don't get a look in, they don't have those deep roots, you see, those tribal connections to the land.

In fairness, it should be pointed out that the kind of critique I've been developing here is also beginning to be heard within the new age scene itself. Thus, for example, the last few issues of *From the Flames: A Journal of Radical Feminist Spirituality, Magic and the Goddess*, have included a running debate on the theme of 'cultural appropriation.' As I've implied, a less essentialist approach would emphasize cultural invention rather than the appropriation, but anyway, it's a start. Certainly it's way in advance of anything that's yet emerged from the second form of new primitivism I want to talk about, the new men's movement.

Ingrid, Donga Tribe:
Yellow Horse told me that everybody has got to get back into living tribally again. To find a way of living close to nature again...

The 'New' New Men?

The new men's movement needs some introduction to readers in the British Isles. Certainly from where I'm sitting, in Newcastle, men's hug-ins and drumming circles seem like pretty remote stuff. However, on the West Coast of Canada and America, where some 18 men's movement journals are currently published, the movement is rapidly establishing itself as a core component of the middle class, thirty-something, liberal milieu.

Unlike the older anti-sexist men's movement (represented in the UK by the magazine *Achilles Heel*), the new men's movement has a distinctive 'mythopoetic' dimension, a dimension characterized by a search for, and celebration of, 'the male spirit.'

It's a project that draws on a whole range of primitivist conceits. A typical men's group will hold tribal council sessions, at which

'elders' will speak, 'talking sticks' will be passed, and African drumming used to engender primal male kinship. This kind of "soul business," as men's movement patriarch Tom Daly calls it, is rooted in both an open resentment of the 'emasculating' power of feminism and the general 'sense of loss' and alienation that, apparently, pervades modern men's lives.

"We lost all the technology of creating men out of boys when colonialism wiped out tribal cultures," bemoans Robert Moore, Jungian analyst and author of a number of the classic texts of the

movement. What is needed, he explains, is an unashamed reaffirmation of masculinity, one that can put men back into touch with themselves. Native cultures' 'natural' and 'instinctive' understanding of the essence of masculinity is central to this enterprise.

One of the more interesting examples of how primitivist myths can be used in this way is the 'wild man' retreat. Such retreats usually take the form of a group of men going off into a forest, or other suitably remote spot, and acting out a series of 'uninhibited' male bonding rituals (no sex of course, just a lot of hugging, dancing, yelling and drumming). The following account is from one such gathering in Wisconsin in 1991:

"We planted our staffs in a double row, forming an aisle running fifty feet up a steep hillside... then one by one, beginning with the eldest, we walked, ran or danced our way to the top to be hugged, held and hoisted into the air by our new brothers' strong arms. As the youngest man reached the hilltop, the drums built to a new climax and we raised a triumphant chant: 'WE ARE MEN!'."

Other rituals have also been developed, many stemming from the concern that new rites of passage are needed for young men to receive the blessing of 'elders' (i.e. older men). One worried writer in the Vancouver men's journal *Thunderstick* expresses these aspirations succinctly: "Society today needs to re-institute the value of elders by honouring the accumulated wisdom and culture of the previous generations."

This process of valuing 'elders' is bound up with men's imputed 'natural' need for authority figures. What we need, notes a writer for *Wingspan: Journal of the Male Spirit*, is "a revival of a more ancient form of mentoring." Taking up this theme a *Thunderstick* contributor explains that "As men, we look to authority figures... a man of authority is respected."

The new men's movement has scoured the earth for tribal ceremonies that can affirm these kind of authoritarian sentiments. It's a process that, to many adherents, appears to be entirely unobjectionable, a kind of rescue and salvage mission of disappearing traditions. However, just as the new tribalist image of the authentic 'native' as passive and unchanging tells us more about colonialist imaginings than it does about 'native' peoples, so too does the men's movement's representation of 'primitive' gender relations.

The portrayal of men in tribal cultures as macho, wild and spontaneous has its historical genesis, I'd suggest, in imperialism's contradictory attempts to sanction patriarchy in Europe whilst portraying non-European cultures as abusive to women and, therefore, in need of enlightened, egalitarian, Western civilization. The figure of the naturally authoritarian, naturally sexist, primitive was employed to bind these antagonistic impulses together. This mythical figure was used to provide proof both of the universality and eternalness of male supremacy and the unacceptable, inferior character of non-Western societies.

As this implies, the real archetype employed by the men's movement isn't the Jungian 'Warrior,' or 'King,' but Tarzan, the imperialist vision of a 'man gone native.' Tarzan is naturally sexist and, when he gets together with African tribesmen, naturally wild. He frightens us with the 'savagery of the dark continent' whilst reassuring us that Western patriarchy is entirely natural.

"The man seeking legitimate empowerment, and his women," explains one writer for *Wingspan*, "must learn to cooperate with the instinctual man-woman, 'me Tarzan You Jane' push from the primate past." Scratch the words 'legitimate' over 'instinctual' and replace the term 'primate' with 'imperial' and this guy's just about spot-on.

The new men's movement and the new age tribalists are just two examples of a much wider trend. Western myths of the primitive Other are being bought and sold, fashioned and refashioned, in an ever increasing variety of ways. It seems that 'we' can't get enough of 'them.' That 'they' never really existed, that 'we' invented 'them,' is almost besides the point. 'They' certainly exist now; at every new age festival, in every remotely trendy clothes store or book shop.

THE BODY ARTIST

The last example of the new primitivism I want to talk about provides ample testimony to just how marketable colonist illusions have recently become.

The ethnic body adornment/piecing scene relies on all the familiar myths of the 'wild other' to generate its transgressive excitement. Ethnic clothes, always 'colourful,' always 'vibrant,' always a mite 'crazy,' are so ubiquitous now as to be a virtual uniform for socially conscious middle class youth. However, stereotypes of the naturally spontaneous, unsophisticatedly playful, Other weave their way through a panoply of ways

Westerners can make their bodies 'go native.' Ethnic apparel, piercings, tattoos and hair designs represent the more conservative, and certainly most consumer-oriented, end of the market. However, beavering away in its research division are a number of cultural workers with a self-conscious penchant for the libidinal and physical 'freedom' and 'extremism' of 'primitive' cultures.

The Californian advertising executive Fakir Musafar (his adopted name) is something of an elder in this scene. Responding to what he calls a "primal urge," Musafar has suspended himself by flesh hooks through his chest in an imitation of the Native American sun dance ceremony, hung heavy lead weights from his penis, and encased it in plaster, in imitation of the actions of India's Sadhu sect, and experimented with a plenitude of other tribal body re-shaping and piercing devices.

Musafar's body work has provided an inspiration for a developing sub-culture of tribally inspired body play, a sub-culture that isn't content with a few ethnic ear-rings but wants to go the full distance; to find out what it's really like inside those alluring 'dark savage minds.'

Perhaps not totally surprisingly Musafar, interviewed in the Re/Search book *Modern Primitives*, explains his interests by noting that he "grew up tempting my primitive lusts by reading good old *National Geographic*. It awakened a lot of people's consciousness."

However, whilst stuffed with the kind of images so central to the new tribalism and the new men's movement, primitivist body art has its own colonial agenda. In particular the emphasis on the savage body and 'abnormal' body alteration recycles a very specific imperial obsession with the non-European as *physically exotic*, as *physically cruel* and as prone to bizarre forms of self-mutilation. These stereotypes have been extensively used throughout the last two centuries to perpetuate the Otherness, the irreducible difference, of 'them' from 'us.' The dualism of the 'ordinary,' 'boring' European body and the 'abnormal,' 'bizarre' non-European body acts to legitimize European normality and civilization, a process that continues to this day.

The new primitives, from the new tribalists, to the new men's movement, to the ethnic body artists, claim to offer 'us' tantalizing glimpses of a different and more natural moral order. They beckon 'us' (i.e. white Westerners) to dark secrets and deep wisdoms.

But when you get there, when you finally delve into the mystic Other, all you find are the reactionary and increasingly stale fantasies of Western imperialism. Call me primitive, call me savage, but I for one believe that it's about time these fantasies were exposed, covered with honey and staked out on an ant-pit.

Notes & Reference Material

- Re/Search No 12—*Modern Primitives*
- Re/Search Publications ISBN 0 940642 14 X
- Wingspan—*Inside The Men's Movement*
- St Martins Press ISBN 0 312 07886 2

• Illustrations on this page and p54 come from these two books

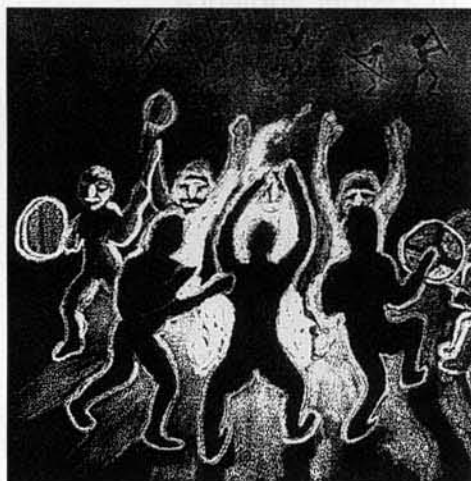
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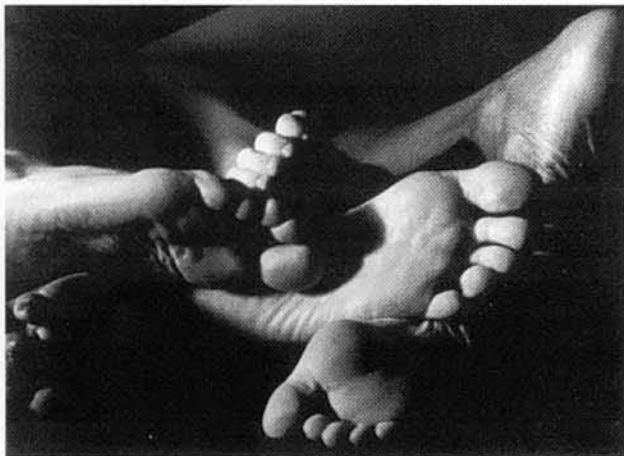
photos from Re/Search No 12 & Wingspan

Fakir, 'modern primitive' body artist:

The whole purpose of 'modern primitive' practices is to get more spontaneous in the expression of pleasure with insight...



Cling Film/Anna Thew 1993



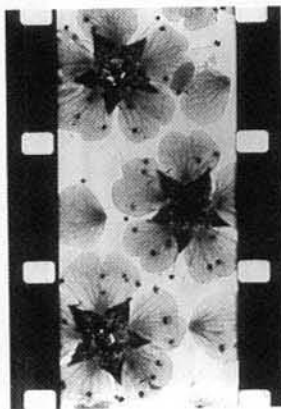
Midnight Underground

Barry Hale questions the nature of Channel 4's attempts to bring experimental cinema to a wider audience

This recent series of underground cinema is long overdue. That Channel 4 have sought to ghettoise it with an after midnight slot is a sad reflection on the failure of TV programming—and with minority programming a prerequisite of its charter, it is the failure of Channel 4 in particular—to offer viewers access to the wealth of avant-garde film history. To present alternative films as programmes in their own right in the way that most channels do with the art animation format, would both reflect the importance of their past influence and actively encourage new explorations of this path to self expression.

Avant-garde film began with the earliest days of cinema but the proliferation of cheap 16mm equipment after the Second World War was to lead to experimentation on an unprecedented scale. The low—and often no-budget works of **Stan Brakhage**, **Kenneth Anger**, **Maya Deren** and other pre-Warhol filmmakers cultivated a respectability for the underground movie in the 1950s, paving the way for a scene which at its

*"Midnight
Underground and
future programmes
like it are... essential
for the development
of film culture"*



Midnight Stan Brakhage

height was to challenge the mainstream cinema for box office receipts.

Combining classic films from this time with more contemporary work, the producers of *Midnight Underground* presented the avant-garde as a living medium still equipped to deal with volatile subjects in an adult and emotive way. This was made particularly clear by **Anna Thew's** *Cling Film*, a 'blue' movie which highlights the danger of sexual inhibition in the time of AIDS. Thew's television version graphically shows how the present censorship laws are in conflict with a need for total frankness. She breaks the sex-on-screen taboo and thereby seeks to initiate an end to society's coyness over AIDS prevention, a coyness which is potentially lethal. Thew justifies the explicit nature of the film, which television is not permitted to show in its original format, with a caption, asking, "What if offending public taste saves lives?"

Alnoor Dewshi's film, *Latifah & Himli's Nomadic Uncle*, explores the equally contemporary issue of identity, race and culture in post-colonial British society. With iconoclastic wit, Dewshi juxtaposes signifiers of exotic Otherness with moments in which Asian/Afro-Caribbean/Anglo-Saxon cultural assimilation is seen to be three way traffic and Identity is revealed as the result of a melting pot of cultural histories.

While these contemporary films were contextualised for us by our familiarity with the issues they address, the earlier American

works did seem to suffer from the programme's failure to establish the original social context in which they were made. Consequently, although we were able to appreciate the beauty of Kenneth Anger's films, we learned nothing of the religious significance the *Magick Lantern Cycle* has for him, and likewise without that essential cultural framework films like *Little Stabs at Happiness* and Kerouac's *Pull My Daisy* were reduced to little more than self-indulgent home movies. Beat nihilism and the dark Milliganesque humour of Andrew Kotting may have things in common visually, but their cultural difference is vast. The danger is of course that any such cultural placing by the presenter might inadvertently frame these films as dry museum pieces for studious research.

Brakhage's *Mothlight* highlighted a further problem for the *Midnight Underground* producers. To see *Mothlight* on a twenty-six inch screen from the detachment of an armchair leads one to understand what the filmmaker means when s/he says that video is merely a means of conveying information and that television can never replace the social and sensory experience of projected film. Like many

underground films, *Mothlight* is a film to be engulfed in; made to be seen in the dark, surrounded by people, projected ten feet high by fifteen feet wide. However, if it was not for *Midnight Underground*, how many people would ever see it?

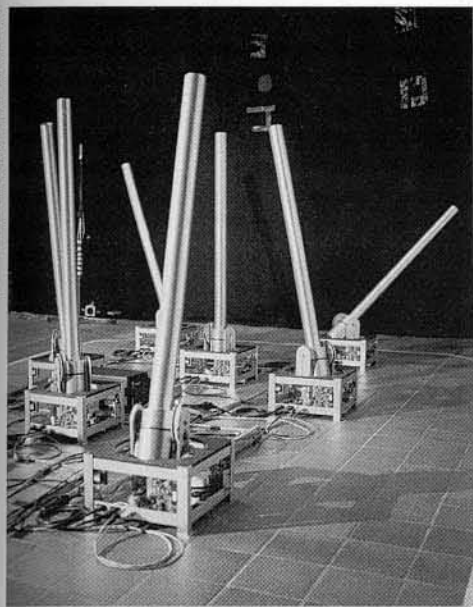
My final criticism of the series is not really criticism at all; the producers simply did not and could never show enough. To see *Un Chien Andalou*, still a remarkable film after 70 years, merely made one hunger for glimpses of *Emak Bakia*, *Ghosts before Breakfast*, *Entr'acte*. After the beauty of Maya Deren's first film, *Meshes of the Afternoon*, one wished to see *At Land*. **Andrew Kotting's** amusing yet unsettling *Hoi Polloi* called for a screening of the hilarious *Klipperty Klop*, **Robert Nelson's** *Oh Dem Watermelons*, the adrenalin charged insanities of Jeff Keen, *Mass for the Dakota Sioux*, *Castro Street*, *Chumlum*—the list is endless. In eight hours *Midnight Underground* could do no more than remind one of the vast store of material that lies out there somewhere, largely unseen by all but the members of art-house cinemas and the London Film Makers' Co-op.

One would have thought that the recent proliferation of camcorders would have brought about a resurgence of low budget filmmaking on a similar scale to that of post-

war America. Unfortunately, the camcorder has so far proved itself to be a conspicuously impotent medium in this respect. This can be due only in part to the poor quality of the VHS image, which admittedly lacks the hyperreality of projected film and somehow accentuates instead the mundanity of real life. But that we see video in this light, as a poor imitation of life and, more importantly, of television, is a stigma which broadcasters only serve to support by their rejection of underground film as a valid component in their day-to-day programming. This short-sightedness has created a situation where home video on television has been consigned to either the video diary documentary or the wheely bin of Beadle's *You've Been Framed*. With the lack of any television forum for low budget filmmaking the enormous potential of video is restrained. *Midnight Underground* and future programmes like it are therefore essential for the development of film culture. Although its timeslot means that *Midnight Underground* must preach largely to the converted, intrigued newcomers will finally gain access to the history of a means of expression which is within their own technological, imaginative and financial grasp.



Lantern and Hirni's Nomadic Uncle
Alnoor Dewshi 1992



European Media Arts Festival

Osnabruck Germany
15th–19th September 1993

The interactive played a central role in the debates around redefinitions of contemporary art and interdisciplinary approaches at Osnabruck. The seminar programme covered interactive architecture, television and hypermedia, and attempted to reinvent interdisciplinary work under the title of *Radical Constructivism*. **Erkki Huhtamo** gave a particularly incisive presentation on the history and nature of interactivity. Interactivity, he argued, is not a new phenomenon. He suggested that the position we are in today is not dissimilar to that of the late nineteenth century when photography, the moving image and electrical devices were becoming available for mass consumption. At that time, interactive arcade games were an important part of popular culture and, as with virtual reality today, technology was ascribed with healing qualities and related to the displacement of the importance of the human body. It was no coincidence, he argued, that at the same time people were playing the Electric Wonder Doctor on seaside piers, the electric chair was invented. In the context of contemporary virtual worlds and using examples of interactive art, Huhtamo examined our dual feelings of participation and disempowerment when engaging with interactive work. Had the spectator really become a protagonist in contemporary art or was s/he still entrenched in the haptic gaze held up particularly by modernism?

These arguments became an important backdrop to viewing the ambitious film screenings and the annual exhibition at the

Dominikanerkirche. On entering the enormous vaulted building, the impressiveness of the architecture was displaced by a reverent but nonetheless sideshow atmosphere. This was the reality of the interdisciplinary approach. It was difficult to view the works separately, as for example **Lei Cox's** *The Sufferance* (shown earlier in 1993 at Video Positive, Liverpool) competed with **Petr Vrana** and **Milan Kunc's** *Demonstrating New Icons*, a series of handheld banners and a ten feet high garden gnome standing on a television set. **Barney Haynes's** *Tales from the Chopping Cart*—in which the supermarket met Tetsuo to create a post-apocalyptic environment—invited the viewer to wheel a shopping trolley with a video monitor fixed to it. Also attached to the trolley

was a barcode tracer for selecting objects in the supermarket; the video then played the piece corresponding to the object. The imagery on the monitor was as rough and deliberately *ad hoc* as the environment and it was refreshing to see this approach among the pristine video installations and computer terminals. **Ulrike Gabriel's** *Terrain 01* and **Louis-Phillipe Demers** and **Bill Vorn's** *Espace Vectoriel* also focused away from the screen, producing two interactive pieces that combined sculptural elements with technology. Both these pieces had technical problems but when they did work they combined a nostalgic quality, referring back to the early days of 'Cybernetics and Serendipity,' with the contemporary to create visually impressive and conceptually challenging pieces.

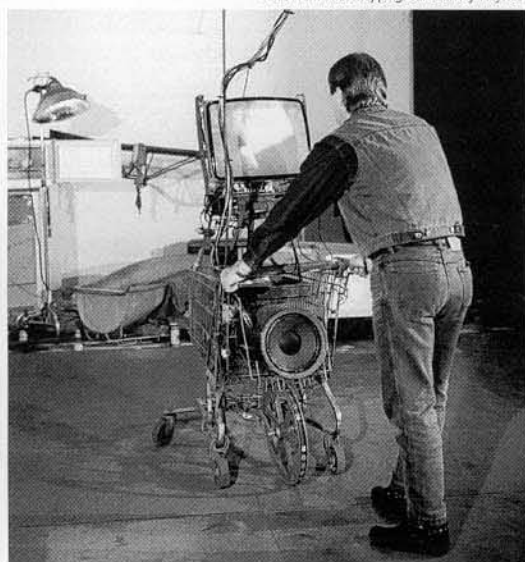
The film programme was far more focused, with the groupings being as interesting as many of the single films and videos. *The Big Pixel Theory* programme looked at work by artists using the Fisher-Price PXL 2000, a disposable toy cine camera no longer on the market because of the rapid deterioration of the picture in relation to cost, and showed a series of films capitalising in various ways on the flawed image. **Sadie Benning's** *A New Year* used the distancing effect of the grain to notate a diary of a young woman which was soft and intimate whilst dealing with stories of rape, racism, drugs and her emergent sexuality. Another high point was **David Larcher's** presentation of his work using computer generated graphics and video dropouts, which capitalised on the disfunctionality of

these systems, combined with rich colour to create a new form and approach to the medium. The film and video café allowed participants to choose works shown in almost all of the screenings, and one of the selections, **Sarah Pucill's** *Milk and Glass*, examining sexuality through the projection of a mouth onto a bowl of milk, showed a very lucid and painterly filmmaking approach.

The level of debate and work shown at EMAF was high but there does seem to be a problem in that *interdisciplinary* is confused with *lack of clarity*. This was particularly apparent in the exhibition where the curators, though brave in their experimentation, had not really resolved the outer extent of the show. EMAF is not unique in having to deal with this lack of focus and it is the subject of much debate as well as personal preference. The piece most obviously out of context was **Gerald van der Kaap** and **Peter Giele's** *Chill Caves*, a booth and mattress with an infinitely reflected video screen above the head showing 'healing' psychedelic imagery, which would have been more appropriate to the EMAF techno party than to the gallery. This is not a criticism of the piece but more a call for curators to take stock of the current cultural free-for-all and establish a direction. If art is to merge with popular culture, science or whatever, it is not necessarily a negative direction, but it does seem that in order to avoid a crisis, the indecisiveness of the interdisciplinary should be halted. EMAF is clearly a significant contributor to the debate, which will no doubt continue in other exhibitions and seminars. Hopefully in the not too distant future some sense of direction and clarity will be resolved.

Helen Sloan

Tales From The Chopping Cart Barney Haynes



Naked City*Film and Video Umbrella
touring package*

Various venues during '93/'94

In **Naked City** Programme 1, *No Age, New York* (1992) documents the fundamental aims behind the '80s 'No Age' underground scene in an unashamedly fanzine style: fifty minutes of fragments and snippets of film interspersed with philosophical mutterings from **Beth B**, **Lydia Lunch** and **Nick Zedd**, names perhaps unfamiliar to film audiences outside the US, or even outside New York. **Naked City** Programme 2 then compiles a selection of videos exemplifying the kind of work being produced in the 'underground scene' of New York in the '90s.

The double-screening package serves as a document of activity in the New York low-budget film/video field in these two decades. There's not much evidence that anything important or refreshing has happened since the glory days of the '80s except for a growing trend in politically correct video guilt trips, MTV-style, or a continuation of the now jaded shock-effect syndrome (now creeping into the mainstream), exemplified by **Tom Kalin** and **Richard Kern** respectively.

The strongest and most provocative works in Programme 2 were created by female video makers such as **Beth B**, **Jenny Holzer** and **Shelly Silver**. It seems that only the female artists make best use of the opportunities available through the underground scene, since they have found through this a way of empowering the still powerless voice that is the female point of view in mainstream thought and culture. The same can also be said for another powerful piece from **John Lindell** which speaks from a gay subjectivity. The rest would appear to be simply big WASP boys playing with their little toys, offering nothing much but crass James Dean-style rebellion. Through this scene the men are frantically looking for a voice that already has power in the mainstream. Their thoughts and opinions can be taken seriously without going 'underground' and so they're delivering nothing particularly new or appealing.

It was only the female artists' philosophies that came across particularly well in the documentary *No Age, New York*. They are the ones who have stopped pretending to make video nasties and have begun to use the medium intelligently to really communicate an otherwise unheard voice, as in **Beth B's** *Thanatopsis* (1991). **Richard Kern**, meanwhile, is still hammering away at post-punk shock tactics in a prehistoric way to a rock soundtrack, saying nothing much and certainly nothing new.



Thanatopsis with Lydia Lunch
Dir: Beth B

Thanatopsis, written and performed by **Lydia Lunch**, is a haunting, unmoralistic mock-tribute to the death-wish society that controls Western culture. Its deeply sinister apocalyptic beauty outshines the surface quality of **Richard Kern's** uninspired trash mini-movies, or **Tony Oursler's** instantly forgettable trilogy, *Model Release/Par-Schiz Position/Test*.

Tom Kalin's three pieces, *Nomads*, *Nation* and *Darling Child*, although beautifully shot, are distant and ineffective, aspiring to the mainstream slickness and political correctness of MTV issue-based shorts.

Jenny Holzer's *Televised Texts*, unannounced and interspersed throughout Programme 2, were subliminally more effective and sinister than in their original appearance as epigrams on the streets of New York: "Somedays you wake up and immediately start to worry—nothing in particular is wrong, it's just the suspicion that forces are aligning quietly and there will be

trouble," is by far the most sinister reading as each locution is flashed across the screen word by word. **Shelly Silver's** *The Houses That Are Left* is an intelligently assembled collage of slogans that emphasises their overuse in a society that doesn't want to think any more.

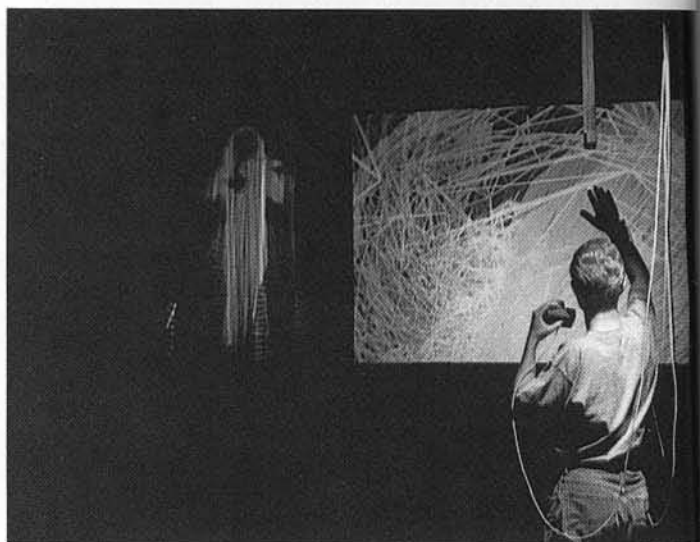
The one message that young British filmmakers might have gleaned from *Naked City* was that essentially these videos can only be effective in their American context. It's all very well to claim that **Jem Cohen's** *Country Feedback* and **Tom Kalin's** *Nomads* are selling out to the pop-promo, but what else is there in a country that invented consumerism, and a film culture already saturated by the Hollywood machine? The result is often a scene that subverts a dominant culture without irony or insight, or a regurgitation of the painterly qualities of art.

Julie Boyne



Police State Nick Zedd

In the second of a series of articles discussing gender in the new electronic age, Sara Diamond outlines eight dichotomies of New Technologies



Electro— Nomads— or an interactive society?

Identity politics [i.d.p], the hallmark of North American cultural practice in the 1990s, reacts to structures of exclusion. At its best, i.d.p. challenges the monotheism of modernism, negotiating a space of speech, at its worst it creates its own backwash of peripheries. When identities rub other identities, when identity itself is queered, inverted, queried, a new interval or space in between can become possible: a coalition, but more... Nomadism suggests the possibilities of undermining essentialist assumptions of identity, of being able to shift shape to respond to changing circumstances. At any given time, some need their identities shaken, others need even a small ledge of speaking space.

A reduction of binaries is dangerous; even a feminist utopia infers dystopia; yet acknowledging the power of technology reorganised could be akin to ignoring the power of the state. Utopia and dystopia are relationships to technology that artists have wholeheartedly embraced. Complexity is more valuable; the same fantasy can disable at one moment and enable at others. In constructing an appreciation/depreciation of cyberspace we need to overlay simultaneous moments of often contradictory analysis.

1] Yes! The daughter's circular pathway through Oedipal narrative has long constituted a feminist quest myth. It can be argued that the non-linear nature of multimedia narrative introduces chance, polyvalent pathways and the disruption of traditional hierarchies and outcomes. Many of the values within feminist experimental practice are coincidentally buried within hypertextual environments. Inciting incidents, narrative peaks, troughs and closure fly out the digital window. Not only this, but the apparent circularity and non-hierarchical structure of multimedia accommodates some forms of non-Western story telling.

No! On the other hand, feminism has relied on intervention, that is, speaking against, as a central strategy. In hypertext, a critical feminist reading is just one amongst many subject positions. Voices are individuated and less disruptive of overall syntax than they would be in a hierarchy.¹

Maybe! This dilemma poses some challenges. Speaking 'out,' to be heard, not reduced to information, remains ever important. Still, given white bourgeois feminism's tendencies to totalize, the forced levelling of pathways and voices *within* a feminist work where agency is assumed is useful. For example, both

Nell Tennhaaf in *Horror Authotoxicus* [Canada] and Linda Dement in *Typhoid Mary* [Australia], work skilfully with and against the resurgent narrative of feminine disease and hysteria in their multimedia pieces. Tennhaaf explores the Western obsession with origin, working between the fatalistic epistemology of western knowledge, programming and prophecy. Disease refers to a threatening inner otherness. Dement mixes pleasure, pain and the erotic in precise but abject images and texts.

2] Yes! Photography printed over 'the original' and digital technology should have finished the concept off by now, after all the copy collapses infinitely into the original and authorship is forever unknown. This metaphor has been applied to gender: femininity and masculinity are simply copies of copies, there is no resurgent, inherent or authentic truth about gender identity.

No! Unfortunately, in the face of humanism's collapse has often come a revival of techno-determinism. In this anthropomorphic paradigm we are always technology's children, caught either as victims in an abusive relationship with our controlling machine parent, or awakening to the dawn of a rapidly improving machine age. The possibility that object-oriented actually means phallic-fixed in this world view goes unsaid.

Maybe! Philosophical hybridity is the only cure, we can't control everything. Despite my best intentions, I dream that I am running terrified through burnt-out buildings.

3] Yes! New technologies promise a more democratic world. For example, networks allow remote communities to send to and receive from sites around the world. Tools are becoming increasingly transparent as computer companies learn to beta-test their products with real people as opposed to engineers and as consumers vote with their dollars for things that work. The increase in information provides at least the potential of accessing complex data from your home or office. Computers allow a resurgence of community, as networked individuals can choose to create connections with each other, and as groups who would never communicate in the 'real' world become allies on the networks. Multimedia learning tools provide 'just in time' learning, teaching people what they need to know when they need to know it, based on individual empowerment.

No! In fact, new technology provides intensified systems of control and surveillance that undermine our basic right to privacy and control our access to information, as well as making us miserable at work. Transparency translates to 'suture' in cinematic terms, hiding the hierarchical structure within the language and grammar of digital technology. Many wilful communities are reactionary, bringing together individuals who resist difference. Since actual identity is unknown, identification takes place through the fantasy of sameness. What's more, if you don't have access or literacy, you are marginalia. Information appears to circulate more evenly but the power to structure it is kept at the top. Knowledge is for sale in the multimedia library, there is no public space left where it circulates freely. The social environment of the classroom teaches us to be social: how do we apply that which we learn when the context is wholly self-referential?

Like so many of my friends, I am so excited about the Internet, connecting me with 'Alt.Arts.NOMAD' and 'Sleeping Beauty,' a feminist theory chat line—a whole world beyond, but because of the rationalization of work, in turn because of new technology, I never have time to check my messages. This world or that?

Maybe! Still, some of the most interesting work in new media tries to open up democratic access to these technologies. Rather than dead-ends these are simply routes of creative, subversive and constructive communication. In Canada, aboriginal groups whose language had almost been lost are building databases of words, sounds and stories. 'Native Net' will connect remote bands, urban aboriginal centres and cultural producers to create new networked systems, and link up projects to keep the news flowing. Network technology can produce a viable polyvalent public forum as an alternative to television. Tools are not neutral, language is embedded in them; the old maxim, you can't fit a round peg in a square hole, fits: Lawrence Paul, an aboriginal virtual reality artist has challenged programmers to look at their assumptions brought in from mathematics (the world is linear and triangular versus Paul's 'the world is round'). Tools need to be adapted to fit the circumstances. Artists' centres such as Interaccess in Toronto, Canada, Fast Breeder in the UK and Casino Container in Germany are examples of 'nodes' or points of contact for artistic creation.

4] Yes! These technologies have provoked a revolution in physics and mathematics. To understand digital phenomena, scientists have had to think in images, have had to adopt chaos. In addition, some members of the corporate sector have also learned to appreciate the creative potential of artists in tool

**...if you don't have access...
feminism has relied on intervention... speaking against
you are marginalia tools are not neutral,
language is embedded in them**

critique and development, providing computer technology to art centres.

No! Maths and sciences use gender specific language, but to date criticism by feminists has been mostly destined for biology. We need to be cautious of an easy seduction and be as unrelenting towards science as it has been to us.

Maybe! The knowledge convergence that new technologies represent has allowed feminist artists to ask provoking question. For example, Catherine Richards' work *Spectral Bodies* transgresses the boundaries between the imaginary and the real in the realm of scientific metaphor and physiological testing as skin and virtual body dissolve into each other.

5] Yes! There are key women authors. Brenda Laurel and Rachel Strickland of Interval Research, Toni Dove, Kathleen Rogers... Women are embraced like rare flowers in the silicon desert of the digital world. There is a sense of relief on the part of developers, government and technologists that there might be another point of view.

No! Perhaps it's really our image, not our images that are wanted. Women are again being used to legitimate change. Most new technologies deploy girlie metaphors—hence the image of the woman leaning across America to stretch her telegraph lines, whose bodily presence domesticates and naturalises technology. Women are primarily users at the lower rungs of the hierarchy. In some technological jobs, such as television editing, the introduction of digital systems has heralded the departure of women. Women remain excluded from computer science and engineering faculties and from earlier education in mathematics.



Maybe! Women need to wobble cyberspace, occupy it, and send it topsy-turvy. The current access to tools and resources for the marginal may be a momentary aperture, one we need to squeeze through *en masse*, not one by one. We need to ask questions and invent practices that take social class, race, sexuality and gender into account: who is the body that is being invented, how compliant is 'she'? How can female cultural practitioners work with disenfranchised women at the ends of the technology chain? Low-end, accessible technologies are as instrumental as high-end, high-price practice.

6] Yes! Cyberspace poses some important challenges to the endless renegotiations of realism. While the idea of another reality is a techno-utopian fantasy, the creation of powerful stories with different values in a technology as immersive as virtual reality could provide important cultural options.

No! The problem is that realism is reified within commercial developments of new technology, carrying into this new practice all of the problems of conflict-driven narrative. We must prevent this 'other' world disconnecting from the hard evidence that times are tough out in Material Land. Can cyberspace be a cultural space that addresses the social?

Maybe! Immersion technologies may be valuable because they permit a 'mise en' *mise en scène*, a hyper context. Texas artist Diane Gromala allows the audience to 'share' her virtual body in *Dancing with the Virtual Dervish*, raising tough questions about display and forced *versus* permitted entry. In *Easy Chair, Electric Chair*, Anne Bray and Molly Cleator, each represented by a monitor mounted on a wheelchair, consider the impact of media on daily life, as they wend their way through numerous chairs in the gallery.

7] Yes! One of the draws of network technology is its role in the upsurge of collective authoring processes, collaboration across disciplines and distances, collaborations which spell out **POWER**. This indicates a continuity with previous collective feminist practices. Fortuitously, it's not easy to control Internet or CompuServe. Lawyers and large corporations are scrambling to establish copyright and regulate authorship, to individuate and so control access. Still, networks are hearty and communications hard to interrupt and detect. Freenets are springing up in North America which enable communication within social movements and between artists in/and various communities. At the same moment, information is increasingly privatised. Relations of power shift; we exchange in a transnational information economy. Some women believe that all power aligns with patriarchy, others that power needs to be seized or at least negotiated; others see the state as a protector, against pornography, for example.

Digital technologies are the means of production of our era, and corporations which control them adopt a state-like configuration. How can we exercise agency in relation to technologies of power now, and not be stymied like the women's movement in the '70s and '80s? New states are coming into being on the net; new forms of regulation. Women and other marginalised peoples need to act in defining these new collectivities, insisting on forms of autonomy, on laws that honour them, while struggling against cyber property!

On the subject of real estate—once you get in, the virtual dominion does not require clear identity papers. Melanin and gender, those vexed biological signifiers, are replaced by social constructs. Identity is signalled through choice, although essentialist clues often abound. The goal is to inhabit cyberspace without conquering it, to be mobile and responsive.

No! In fact, the territorial imperative resonates in the very language of Cyber. In the history of Western culture, it is the feminine body which prompts conquest and exploration, she is the adventurer's metaphor. The new media *flâneur*, a modernist, is ever at home even within the deteriorated streets of the post-holocaust city, as he negotiates pathways through virtual body/woman/machine/territory, jacking in, charting, divvying up. Cyberspace is a country with a bad immigration policy. Rather than an outpost of freedom, it is a last bastion against shared social power.

Maybe! Even if this is true, networks—like any other fictional form—promise the lure of stepping across prohibitive boundaries and set new limits at the same moment. The Electronic Cafe International fast facilitated bridges between poets of usually hostile communities in LA. The physical separation allowed trust to build. What happens when the people meet body to body—does it ultimately matter? These bridges don't transcend identity politics but offer a new complexity to them.

8] Yes! Language can be invented—ultimately, we must ask—*what is our vision of digital culture?* Philosophical globalism is 'dust.' The nation state is in deep crisis. Empowerment of the local, and subversive relationships across geography are possible; new forms of dissemination make cultural autonomy and self-defined connectivities a reality.

No! Language is imported. Language cannot be separated from the social, nor can technologies—"Beware of the paradigms we import wholesale into cyberspace."² The brutality of language in and out of cyberspace signifies social violence. As new technologies come into working environments, alienation increases with the workload for many. Whose language are we using, what else are they responsible for? Whose language rules the design of the cyberbody?

Maybe! Feminisms love language, but despite ambivalence there is something to be said for retaining the body. Artworks resonate with anxiety about loss, reminding us of the body's corporeality, its vulnerability, its difference(s), its displacement, geographic and temporal, its relationship with nature, its biological memory, its potential in defining a new set of pleasures. Women artists seem less interested in creating a complete world view/body separated from conventions and knowledges in which we operate. Rather, art allows spaces of aperture, of randomness as well as predictability. Cyberpunk, even Girl Cyber, fades fast, rife as she is with bourgeois individualism and boy talk. What language can describe the 'artist?'—a chip in a corporatist main frame; a resistor/bandit; an instrument of the oppressed, an inventor of bachelor/bachelorette machines, a modernist hero; an artist as cyborg transfigured from scientist, an oscillating identity, a plurality, a coalition...

Notes

1 See Kathleen Burnett, 'Towards a History of Hypertextual Design' *Postmodern Culture*, 3:2 Jan 1993

2 Kit Galloway, *Electronic Cafe International*

**FREE BOOZE,
NOSH & STRIPPERS**

at 6pm on Tuesday 26 October
at the Guildhall, Aldermanbury, London EC2.

**A NIGHT OUT
FOR THE HOMELESS**

Organised by
THE BOOKER BENEVOLENT FUND.

This card admits one person only.

"When 'high art' hack Richard Burns hanged himself, the literary establishment responded by wringing its hands. One year on, it's high time bores like Salman Rushdie, Martin Amis and Julian Barnes wring their own necks. To encourage these parasites to top themselves and simultaneously celebrate the Richard Burns suicide anniversary, the Neoist Alliance is organising a psychic attack on the book trade."

These were the opening lines of a leaflet the Neoist Alliance began distributing in June 1993. As *The Times Literary Supplement* reported on 30th July '93, the aim was to make it clear to the literati that hardback fiction has no social value whatsoever and is, in fact, a form of mental pollution. The coverage of our activities in the TLS, *Time Out* on 25th August '93 and *New Statesman* on the 10th September '93, all omitted to mention that this action was intended to celebrate the first anniversary of the suicide of literary novelist Richard Burns. The Neoist Alliance had breached the cultural establishment's code of good taste and the result was a partial censorship in the reporting of our activities.

Having mailed copies of these leaflets to numerous authors, editors and agents, word soon filtered back to us that our 'bestly' activities had the literati choking on their wine as they discussed the Neoist threat at dinner parties. Despite the partial media black-out on the suicide celebration, we'd made sure that everyone in the book world knew exactly what was going on. The fury we provoked, proved a point that had been made in our leaflet, namely that most of those actively promoting literature feel anxious about their work and are uncertain as to whether it has a socially useful function.

Having sent one set of shock waves rumbling through the literary establishment, the Neoist Alliance proceeded to compound the damage by distributing fake Booker Prize invitations to down-and-outs. The small orange cards carried the following message: Free Booze, Nosh & Strippers at 6pm on Tuesday 26 October at the Guildhall, Aldermanbury, London EC2. A Night For The Homeless. Organised by The Booker Benevolent Fund. This card admits one person only.

By this time, the literati were up in arms over the activities of the Neoist Alliance and had imposed unofficial sanctions against our organisation. Although cards and a press release were distributed to literary critics, there was no way they were going to cover this story! It was left to *The Sun*, on 7th September '93, to break the news with a page three item headlined 'Prize Night Freebie Is A Strip-Off!' Taking its lead from the tabloids, *The Guardian* ran the story the following day. We were successfully spreading our message beyond the tiny coterie of book bores who control English fiction. Better still, the scumbags we'd attacked were smarting because they're not used to being described as pompous gits who needed to be brought down to earth!

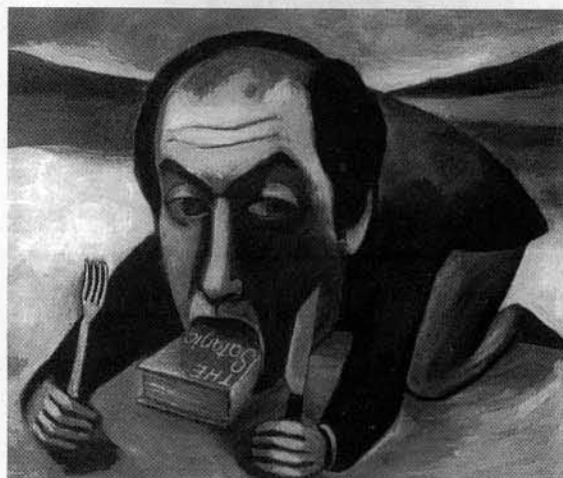
Simultaneously, news broke that the workers sacked from a Booker mushroom farm in Yorkshire planned to organise a *Ban The Booker* demonstration outside the Guildhall on the night of the prize ceremony. Believing it was pointless to have two separate demonstrations taking place on the night, the Neoist Alliance cancelled its own operation and instructed sympathisers to support the sacked workers instead. *The Evening Standard*, on 27th October '93, in a news story headlined 'Free Booze and Strippers but still no Booker Demo,' claimed that "...the enemies of order, middle class literature and socialites in dickie bows and posh frocks" failed to "mass a mob... to terrorise the assorted grandees and intellectuals gathering... for the biggest night in the literary calendar."

Smears of this type reveal just how desperate book bores have become to discredit the Neoist Alliance. The *Standard* also quoted our press release as saying we are against the book trade "because it exists to prevent energetic, exciting and innovative work being published." The fact that this quote was wrenched out of context has led us to consider revising the sentence that followed it—perhaps we were wrong to suggest that "the publishing industry is not *consciously* organised as a conspiracy against youth and vigour but acts as such because good 'taste' dictates that 'writers' replicate the ideals of a long gone and unlamented age."

Booker

Our Tactics Against The Literary Establishment

Boycott





DREAMS / DREAMS / DREAMS / DREAMS



AUTOMATIC

NO

DREAMS